

Introduction:

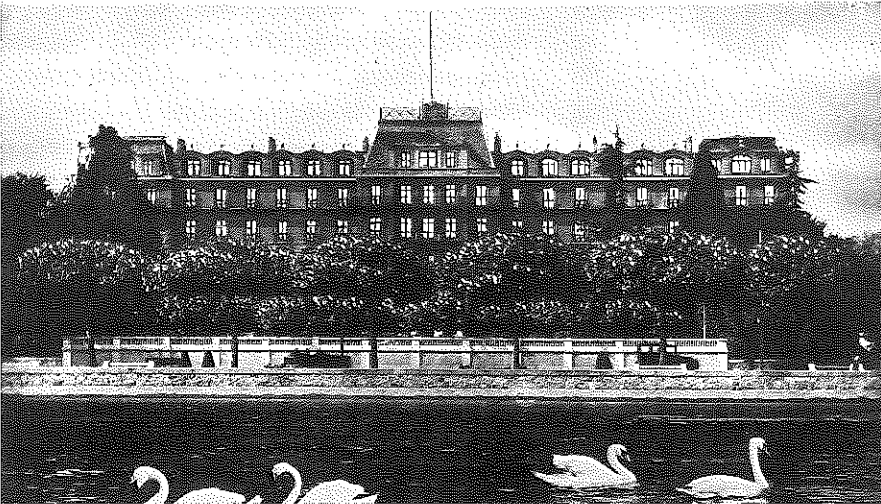
Beginnings of the Design Process

The challenge was tremendous: In a matter of months, leading architects from among the fifty member states of a newly formed United Nations were to create an architectural concept of an inspiring yet practical headquarters, on a small site in a crowded city, with limited funding. The anticipated drama within such a group of architects and with their clients was already fascinating those of us who were to be involved in the creative effort, as well as attracting public attention and press speculation worldwide.

What was not expected was that the story of designing the United Nations Headquarters would provide a unique case study of the process of creative design.

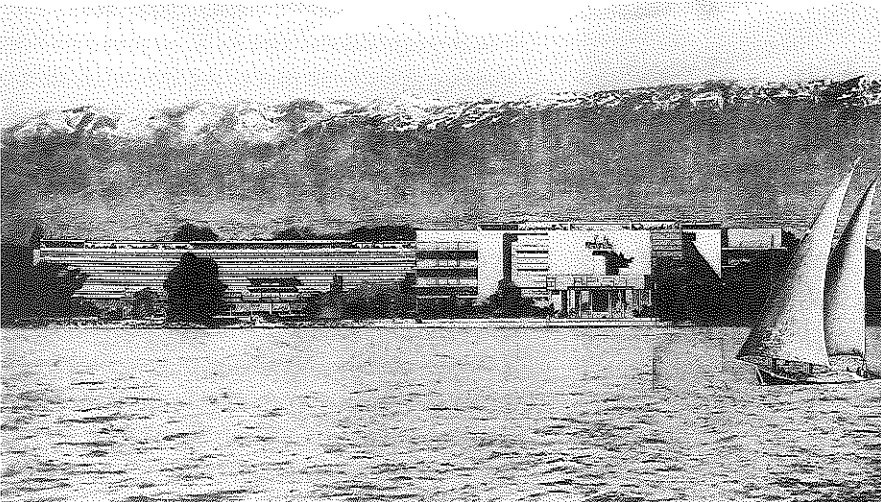
Decisions made early in January of 1947 set the course of the design effort and now make it possible to reconstruct and examine the process and to understand who designed the United Nations Headquarters. Detailed records exist of activities between the decision of the United Nations General Assembly in December 1946 to acquire the site in mid-Manhattan and its unanimous acceptance of the plans for it nine months later.

The decision to appoint a board of design rather than to hold a competition to choose an architect for the Headquarters governed much that followed. The League of Nations' ponderous Palace [1] on its lakeside site in Geneva resulted from such an international competition [2]. The process was lengthy; many years elapsed from the time of the decision on site location until buildings were available for occupancy.¹ Determined to speed up the process this time, U.N. Secretary-General Trygve Lie [3],

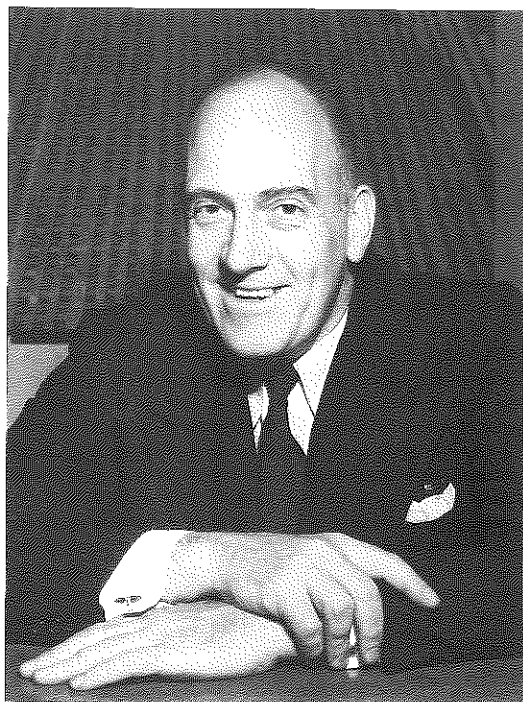


1. *Le Palais des Nations*, seen from Lake Geneva.

2. Lakeside elevation of Le Corbusier and Jean-neret's entry in the architectural design competition for *Le Palais de la Société des Nations*, Geneva, 1927.

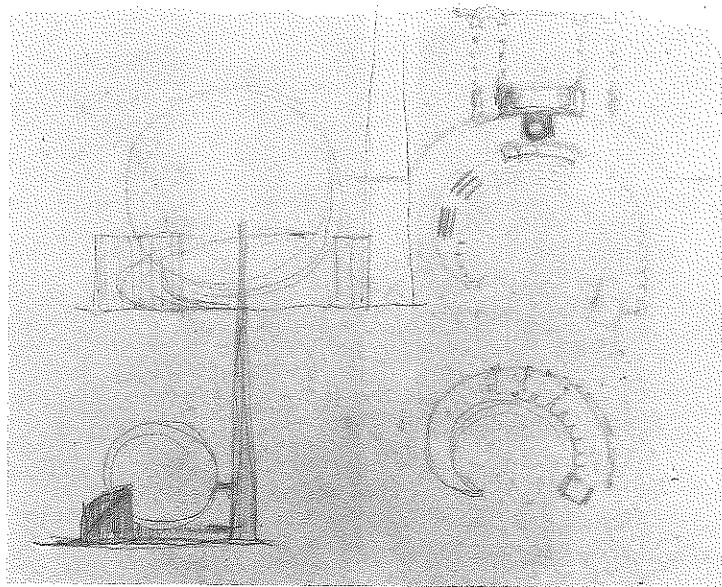


3. United Nations Secretary-General Trygve Lie.



4. Wallace K. Harrison at his office in the International Building of Rockefeller Center.

5. Design study sketch by Harrison composing the sharply vertical Trylon with the Perisphere's low, solid mass, from one of his "Doodle Books," in his Archive at Columbia University.



decided an international board of design should be convened to carry out the initial design.

Lie's recommendation of a board made the creative process that followed uniquely available for examination in detail. This is rare. Most often, when an architect designs a project, the bulk of his thinking is internal with the expression of its results recorded by his drawings, notes, or, infrequently, a journal. His mind, and his mind's eye, range widely over a spectrum of givens, objectives, possibilities, constraints, solutions, designs. But when the combined minds and "eyes" of a group of architects analyze and design those elements, each must articulate his thoughts to the others, to achieve communication necessary to reach a common goal.

Shaping the actions of the Board of Design would be Wallace K. Harrison whom the Secretary-General had already appointed Director of Planning [4]. A New Yorker, noted for his contributions to the design of Rockefeller Center and the thematic Trylon and Perisphere of the 1939 World's Fair [5], his recent wartime experience at the head of the Office of Inter-American Affairs, his work in arranging temporary quarters in San Francisco for the conference that established the United Nations, as well as his role in the development of New York City's initial proposal for the U.N. site in Flushing Meadow Park, were part of the special qualifications Harrison had for this task. Few could match his knowledge of New York City, particularly of the East River site, and his many friendships with governmental leaders and architects from other nations. Less known were his skills as a leader and developer of consensus, which would shape the result.

Harrison's aim was to obtain creative contributions to the design process from all the architects who would be brought together and to avoid unnecessary conflict among them. This led, unintentionally, to creating an unusual base for exposing the detailed record of this process of design. As far back as his experience on the committee of architects designing Rockefeller Center, he avoided the keeping of minutes for almost any series of meetings. He believed time taken for discussion of the record of a previous meeting deflected fresh creative energy and enthusiasm. As he started the Board of Design's

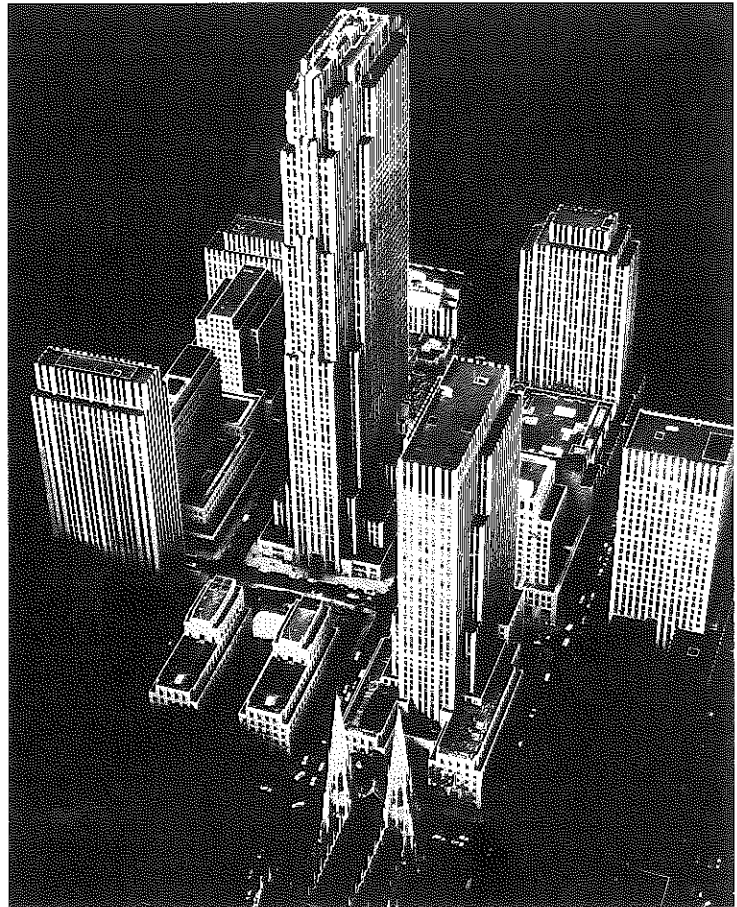
first meeting, he said no minutes would be kept, but that I, as his assistant, would keep notes; anyone wanting information on what transpired could check with me. Through all the board's meetings I kept a detailed record of everything said, omitting repartee and small talk not germane to the purposes of the meeting or work of the board. Those notes are the basis for my reconstruction of the meetings, providing the central material for this case study.

Beginnings of design processes vary greatly, often lying far back in history, at all levels of history, cultural and individual. As the Board of Design began to assemble for its work on the United Nations Headquarters, two design episodes were in many minds.

Rockefeller Center, where we were meeting, was and continues to be a signally important complex, a monumental presence achieving new heights of urban planning and design of high-rise buildings. Its design process was also a group effort, led by Harvey Wiley Corbett and Raymond Hood, with Wallace Harrison a junior member. Close communication with the client-owner-user from the start of program development through final construction was a model for the participants in the design of the United Nations. The experience gave Harrison abilities he would use in conducting the meetings and work of the United Nations Board of Design, earning him the respect of all its members.²

The Center was also a giant step in the development of the slab form for the next generation of skyscrapers [6]; its urban design is an examination and manipulation of a multiblock site, far above and below grade level. Without this successful model in mid-Manhattan and the experience of its earlier design process, the U.N. Headquarters might not have been built where it is or with those qualities that have served so well the needs of the new world organization.

The New York World's Fair of 1939-40 was another precursor, a form of international group effort by a stimulating combination of city officials and architects from around the world [7]. The Fair buildings (although not the Flushing Meadow site plan) represented a wholehearted break from the Beaux Arts and eclecticism. The project helped many become familiar with the



6. Rockefeller Center's prototypical skyscraper slabs, placed in "pinwheel" format, setting high urban design and environmental standards.

7. The 1939 World's Fair in Flushing Meadow Park, the site initially proposed by New York City for the United Nations Headquarters.



work of the others, most importantly with Wallace Harrison and Max Abramovitz, both as designers of the Fair's Theme Center and as part of its board of design, and with key city officials, particularly Parks Commissioner Moses and others in the power structure of New York. Architectural reputations and friendships were established that led to the selection of a number of the same designers for the United Nations. Howard Robertson, whose firm were architects of the British Pavilion, continued his long friendship and high regard for Harrison.³ Sven Markelius, Stockholm's Director of City Planning, the designer of the Swedish Pavilion, much admired by Harrison, came to know other New York architects active at the Fair who were to have roles in the U.N. design: Louis Skidmore, Ralph Walker, and Gilmore Clarke. Oscar Niemeyer, acclaimed for his Ministry of Education Building

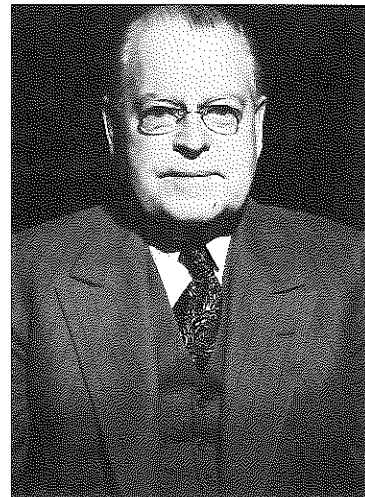
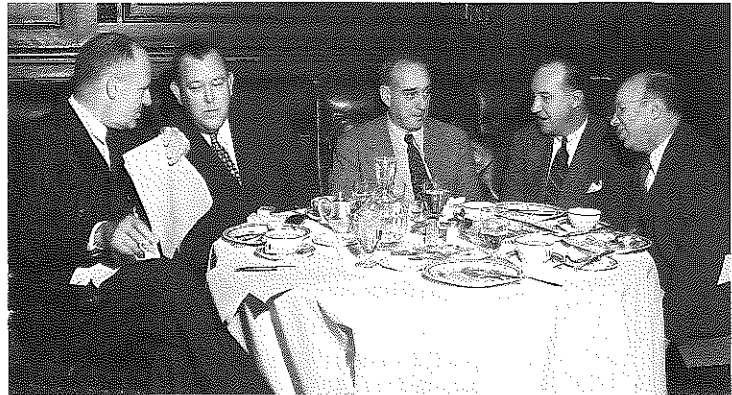
in Rio de Janeiro, designed the Brazilian Pavilion, a fine example of the "modern" vocabulary.

Architects at the Fair had the experience of operating within the systems that make New York City work, learning the balance between the mayor, borough presidents, city engineers, and Robert Moses' semiautonomous empire, run from his power base as Parks Commissioner, member of the City Planning Commission, and, since 1946, Construction Coordinator. The Fair was the domain of this greatest builder the city has known. He created the site, 1,200 acres of parkland, by dumping the city's waste into marshy Flushing Meadow, including, as he wrote happily, "all the old umbrellas from Brooklyn."⁴ The exposure the Fair gave the U.N. architects with Moses, his associates, and others of influence in the city, was helpful in working effectively with Harrison when the time came to deal realistically and speedily with problems and potentials of the U.N. site and its physical context and urban environment [8].

The Formation of the United Nations: A Client Is Born

The World's Fair in Flushing Meadow Park closed its first season as Hitler was seizing Czechoslovakia and marching into Poland; in 1940, its second season carried on as the fearful Battle of Britain was waged across the Atlantic. The "World of Tomorrow," to which the Fair's theme referred, had been dismantled by the time President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill promulgated the Atlantic Charter, which all fifteen nations in the coalition against the Axis endorsed. Twenty-four days after Pearl Harbor, on New Year's Day 1942, the coalition, now twenty-six nations, joined in the Declaration of the United Nations, the title coined by President Roosevelt for that document's final draft. From the early days of the war, he looked ahead to peacetime, first with a committee to pursue "research and planning for the postwar period." Several of its members worked for the founding of the United Nations and continued during the design phase of its Headquarters: Warren R. Austin, Republican senator from Vermont, as head of the U.S. Delegation [9]; Benjamin V. Cohen, Counsel to

8. United Nations site is discussed at the Plaza Hotel: Harrison; Lie; Robert Moses; Charles Preusse, Assistant Corporation Counsel, New York City; George Spargo, General Manager, Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority.



9. Chief of the United States Mission to the United Nations, Senator Warren R. Austin from Vermont.

the Department of State, as Assistant Secretary-General; and Texas's Democratic Senator Tom Connally, who later led in securing Congressional approval of the Headquarters construction loan.

In late 1940, from concern for the solidarity of the Western Hemisphere, President Roosevelt brought Nelson Rockefeller to Washington to be the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. With him came his close friend, Wallace Harrison, soon to be his deputy. A young Navy volunteer in the first World War, eager to be part of this new effort, he added communications to the office's programs in commerce and culture.⁵ Working directly with Harrison, as his assistant for four years, I observed their wide-ranging concerns, positive approaches to problems and opportunities, and mutual preference for graphic presentation of almost every kind of information.

Two steps that Roosevelt and Churchill took during the war years generated questions the architects of the United Nations Headquarters would face. In 1943, an international conference established the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and six months later, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) was founded. The location of such activities, later called Specialized Agencies, became part of the Board of Design's definition of a central Headquarters. Should such subsidiary agencies be near or on the central site? Should they be decentralized, sited in a number of regions to broaden U.N. ties with its international constituency?

The next year, when the allied leaders met at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington to draft a charter for the United Nations, they were faced with decisions on the nature of the Security Council, and its role and importance relative to the General Assembly. Three years later the designers of the Headquarters were still wrestling with this difficult problem.

Franklin Roosevelt died on 12 April 1945. Within an hour of his taking office as president, Harry S. Truman announced that the United Nations Conference on International Organization would take place as planned on 25 April, in San Francisco's "Cow Palace." Harrison was asked to bring staff from his office, and under the leadership of junior partner Michael M. Harris, who

had been named "Conference Space Officer," they quickly converted the convention building into appropriate meeting rooms and work space for Delegates, the Press, staff, and support facilities. Two months' deliberation there produced a charter, signed by Delegates from fifty nations and ratified in July by the United States Senate. The last action on the agenda was initiating the search for a Headquarters site; an Executive Committee was named to receive proposals that had begun to swirl around the Delegates.⁶ The client was born in San Francisco; the process of design of its new home had begun.

The Search for a Site — Where Is the Center of the World?

The day after Japan surrendered, the United Nations Executive Committee met in London near Westminster Abbey, in Church House, which had been used by Parliament after its historic Houses were damaged by German bombs. Delegates may have thought of the Headquarters-to-be in Churchill's words: "We shape our buildings and then our buildings shape us."⁷

The committee's charge was to recommend a country where a site would be selected. The United Kingdom, France, and a few others proposed Geneva, Switzerland, arguing that location at Europe's center could best prevent another conflict, despite the failure of the League of Nations. Believing distance lent objectivity, others lobbied for ancient cities of North Africa and for exotic Pacific isles.⁸ Trygve Lie, elected the U.N.'s first Secretary-General, urged "the world's new center of gravity be on the northwest shore of the Atlantic." Others agreed, hoping to "secure the fullest U.S. participation."⁹ The Soviet Union advocated a location in the United States, to lessen American influence in Europe. Mayors of Chicago, San Francisco, Boston, Denver, St. Louis, and Miami led or sent delegations to London; presidential sites were proposed: Mount Vernon, Virginia, Washington's home; birthplaces of Lincoln in Harden, Kentucky, and Roosevelt in Hyde Park, New York. Wyoming, Nebraska, and South Dakota jointly offered a site in the Black Hills.

San Francisco had an edge since Delegates had already enjoyed that handsome city. Three

highly regarded local architects, William Wurster, Theodore Bernardi, and Ernest Born, prepared an exhibit of a Proposed United Nations Center [10]. "With little but their own ingenuity to guide them, they established their own program and then proceeded to solve it . . . Born's striking drawings aroused great interest among Delegates and served to crystallize public opinion."¹⁰ Philadelphia offered her two major parks, including long lengths of the Schuylkill River penetrating to the heart of its downtown [11]. New York City did not send a delegation to London or submit a proposal for a site until late 1945; it did offer the United Nations temporary quarters at Hunter College's campus in the Bronx.

By September, despite opposition from France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, the Executive Committee voted to locate in the United States. It looked for acceptable climate, English or French as the dominant language, good living accommodations, health, education, and recreational facilities, office space, travel services, and adequate land. To find all this in the Black Hills was as difficult a presumption as in remote islands of the Pacific. Sensitive questions emerged of diplomatic immunities and privileges, inviolability of U.N. buildings and property, workable visa and immigration policies, freedom of movement for the press and diplomatic personnel, and unrestricted, uncensored communications with the world at large.

A seven-nation subcommittee, chaired by Dr. Stoyan Gavrilovic of Yugoslavia, took "evidence from municipalities which had offered sites," but "agreed no hurried attempt should be made to define requisites for the site," to the dismay of many eager applicants. The vote to locate in the United States reached a bare two-thirds majority; Canada moved it be unanimous, the U.K. seconded, the chair declared it carried by acclamation. Spirits rose and an Interim Committee was appointed to select areas in the eastern United States "within 50 to 60 miles from Boston; east of the Hudson River in New York or Connecticut, 25 to 80 miles from New York City; or the Princeton, New Jersey area."¹¹

In January, the Inspection Group began its survey scanning the horizon from the 67th floor

of Rockefeller Center, as McKim Norton, Executive Director of the Regional Plan Association, presented data on Westchester and Fairfield counties and for evaluating sites of 2, 5, 10, 20, and 40 square miles [12].

At lunch in the Chrysler Building's Cloud Club, the group looked over the East River to Flushing Meadow Park, New York City's current candidate. From these overviews, they descended to City Hall to meet Mayor-elect William O'Dwyer, who had joined Mayor LaGuardia in appointing a blue-ribbon United Nations Committee, including Robert Moses, chairman of a zealous and effective Committee on Plans and Scope. Winthrop W. Aldrich, head of the Chase Bank, was Vice Chairman and Treasurer; his energetic nephew, Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller, also was a member. Wallace Harrison and Louis Skidmore, with Gilmore Clarke as chairman, were appointed by Moses to a board of design for the New York City proposal, a measure of their position in its power structures.

A week later, in his letter of appreciation for the warm welcome received at City Hall, Chairman Gavrilovic repeated limits set on urban sites by the Inspection Group's mandate, effectively eliminating New York City. O'Dwyer replied that "discussion of New York or its environs may be superfluous. . . . we cannot forbear expressing regret that Flushing Meadow should be ruled out . . . in spite of improvements and facilities in place, LaGuardia airfield . . . and all manner of transportation."¹²

The next day the group flew up the Hudson Valley, placed a wreath at President Roosevelt's grave at Hyde Park, and visited with Vassar College President Henry Noble McCracken and New York's Governor Thomas E. Dewey, a format followed in ensuing days as they toured candidate areas of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, and met with university presidents, governors, mayors, planners, and other boosters. Before flying back to London a week later, the group scanned proposals piling up in their Rockefeller Center offices from Australia, Bermuda, Hawaii, Quebec, and many more, even New York City boroughs.

They arrived as the first session of the General Assembly opened by electing Trygve Lie Secretary-General; by a 46-3 vote, he was

PROPOSED UNITED NATIONS CENTER

A world capital in the San Francisco Bay Area designed by William Wilson Wurster, Theodore C. Bernardi and Ernest Born.



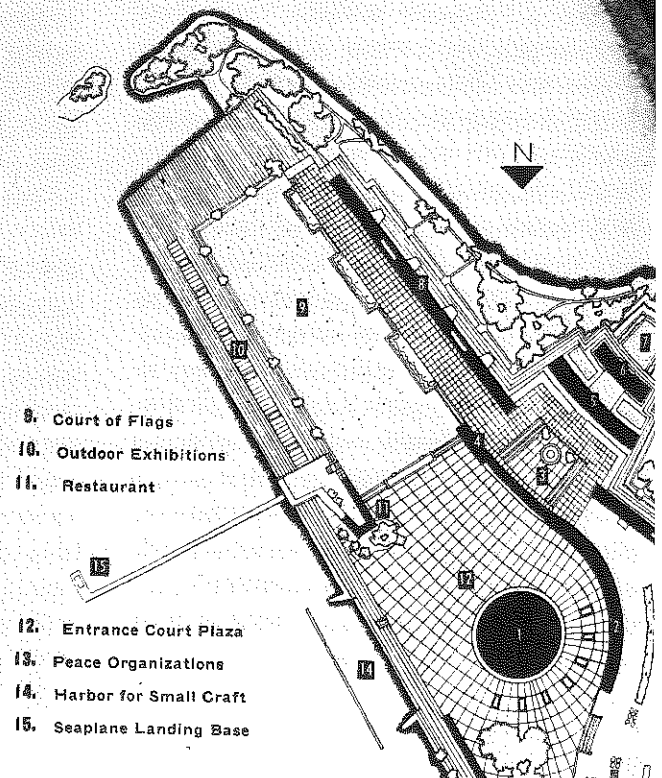
To reaffirm San Francisco's hope to be chosen as the permanent center for the World Peace Conference, the delegates were given a preview of a proposed building group hastily contrived by three well-known architects. With little but their own ingenuity to guide them, these designers established their own program and then proceeded to solve it. Ernest Born's striking drawings aroused widespread interest among the delegates and served to crystallize favorable public opinion, strongly supported by the local press.

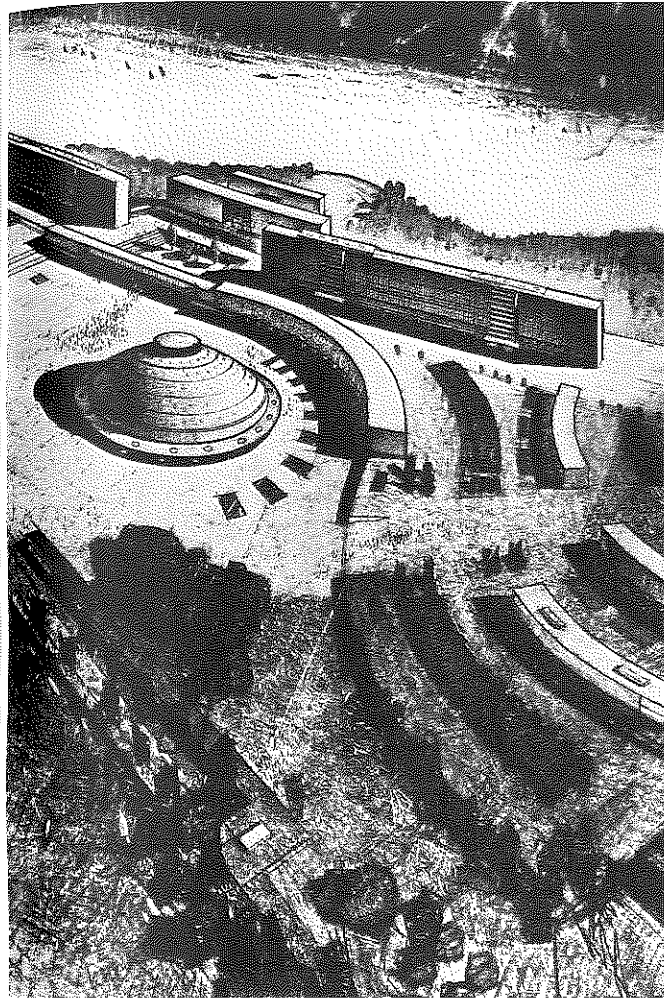
The site selected is a 1,000-acre tract, now a part of Stanford University's vast campus. Located on a peninsula in the northern part of San Francisco harbor, it commands a dramatic bay view, is protected from the prevailing west wind by Marin County's richly molded mountains.

Two secretariat buildings, an auditorium and office buildings to house individual peace organizations constitute the working nucleus of the plan; the library, museum and archives, its reference-research facilities. Several impressive courts and plazas provide a spacious and dignified setting.

Traffic and circulation are served by approach roads which sweep past the entrance gates, and lead to a parking area located under the central court, connected by elevators to the principal buildings of the center.

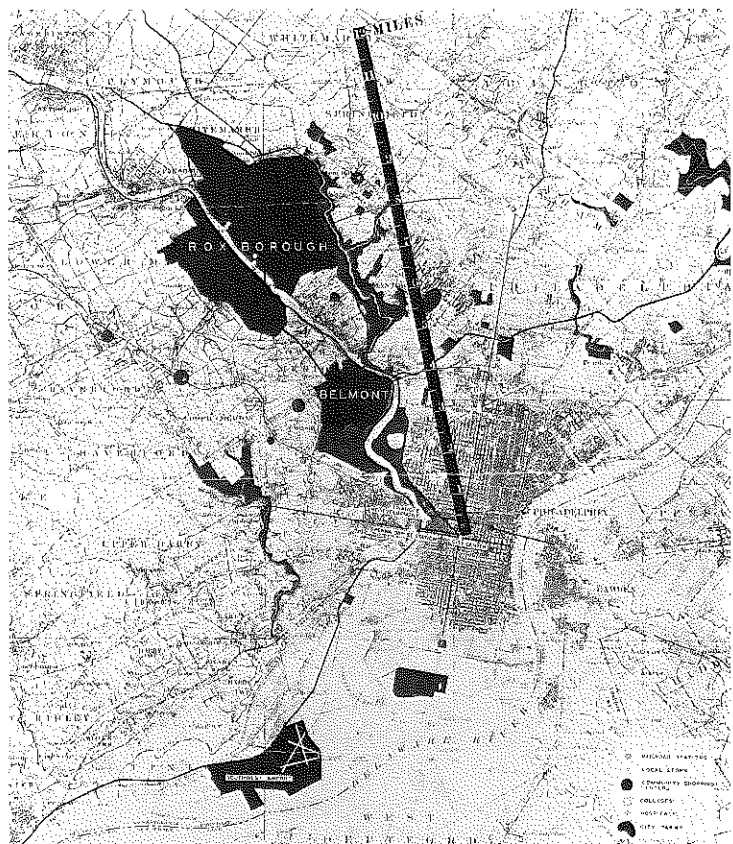
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| 1. Auditorium | 5. Library | 12. Entrance Court Plaza |
| 2. Archives Building | 6. Museum | 13. Peace Organizations |
| 3. Library Court | 7. Outdoor Museum | 14. Harbor for Small Craft |
| 4. Press | 8. Secretariat Building | 15. Seaplane Landing Base |

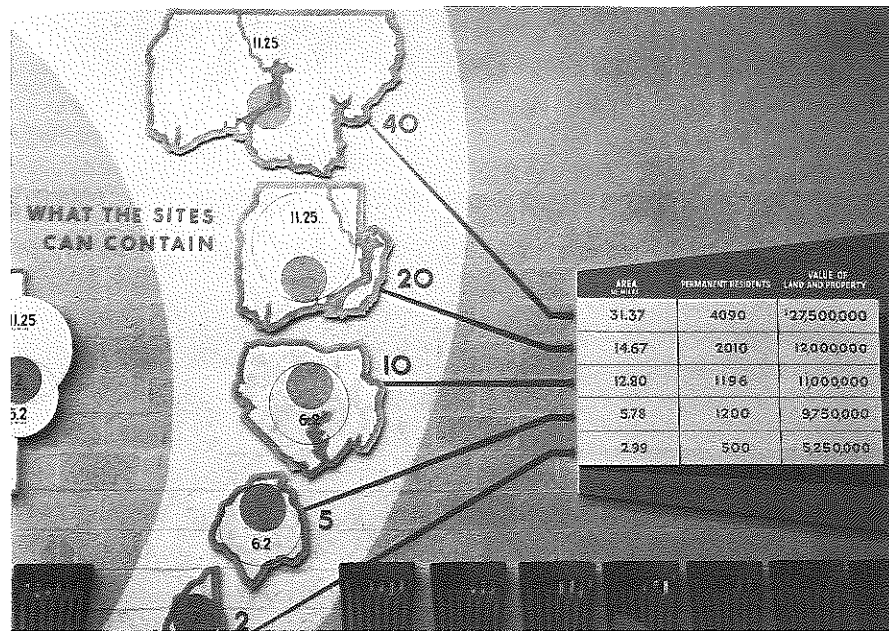




10. An early proposal from California architects to locate the United Nations Headquarters on a peninsula in the San Francisco harbor.

11. Philadelphia's proposed sites in downtown parks along the Schuylkill River.





12. Alternate sites in Westchester and Fairfield counties.

“nothing less than catapulted into the Secretary-Generalship,” to use his own words, “a challenge beyond my wildest dreams . . . a nightmare as well . . . why had this awesome task fallen to a labor lawyer from Norway?” Much more than that, during the war Lie had risen to be foreign minister of Norway’s government-in-exile in London. Sworn in for a five-year term, he wrote: “Planning and building this great structure [the Headquarters] was among the projects closest to my heart.”¹³

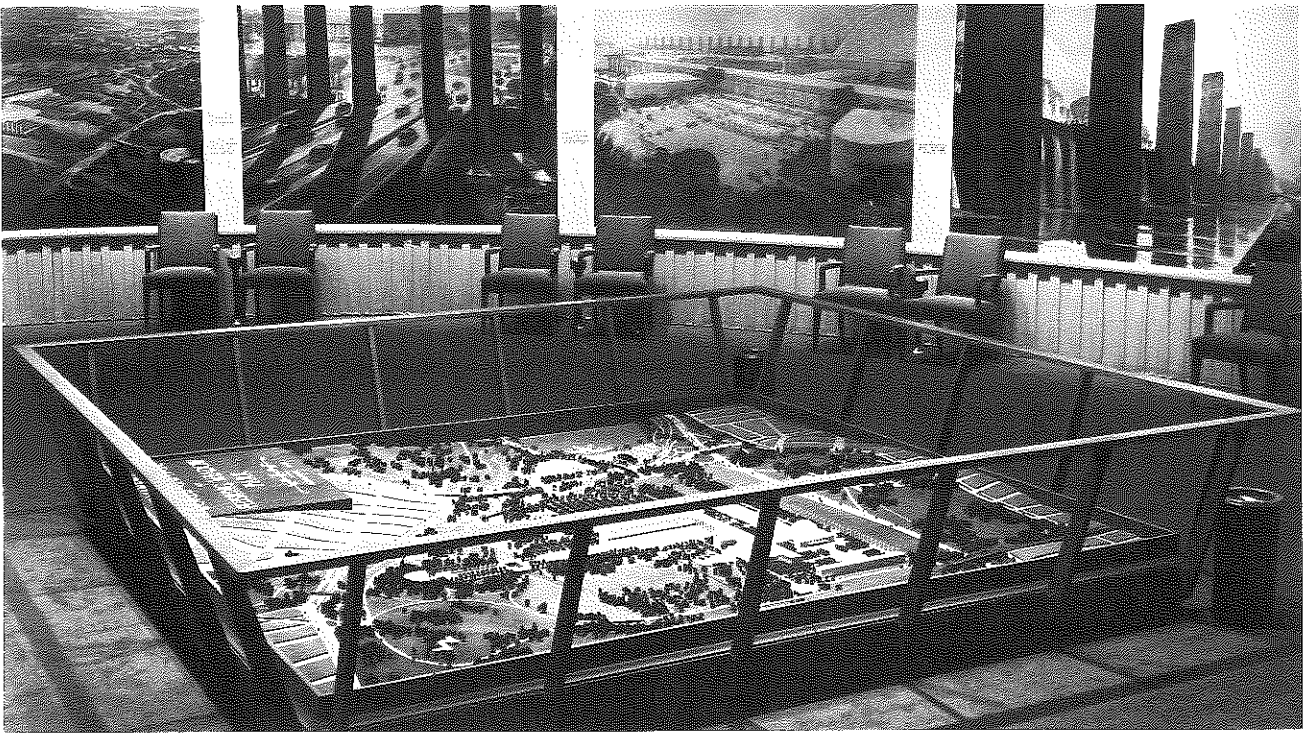
A ladder of reports produced General Assembly Resolution 8, adopted 14 February 1946: “the Permanent Headquarters . . . shall be established in Westchester and/or Fairfield counties . . .”¹⁴ Now the Assembly formed a Headquarters Commission to make an exhaustive study of that area and report back by early fall. France picked Le Corbusier as its Delegate to the Commission, “to defend modern architecture and town design in a problem of world importance.”¹⁵ Another member was Russian structural engineer Nikolai D. Bassov, who would join Le Corbusier later on the U.N. Board of Design for the Headquarters.

The Commission also had to help the Secretary-General arrange “temporary installation of the organs of the United Na-

tions . . . the General Assembly in September . . . and housing the Delegates”—despite a war-induced shortage. “Troubles of the moment were more than adequate,” said Lie.¹⁶

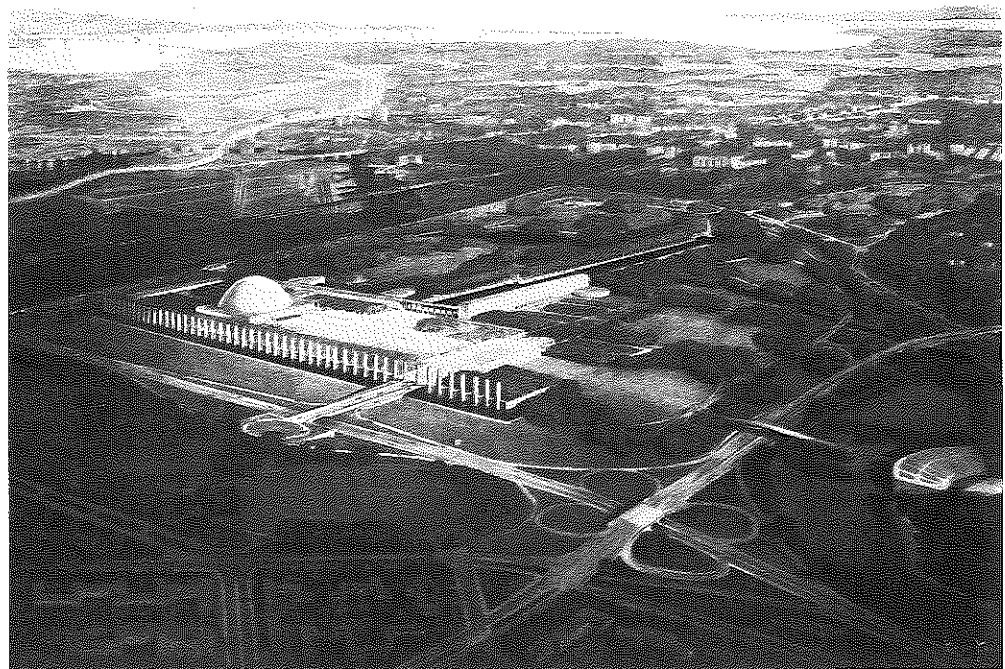
Despite the restriction to sites in the two counties adjoining New York, San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Boston kept pressing the Commission, which held thirty-eight meetings, hearing from thirty added candidates, with what Site Search Committee assistant Sorenson called “confusing vigor.”

In New York, Moses was still promoting Flushing Meadow for two reasons; it was the largest unused New York City area with improvements in place and paid for, and his reputation was at stake to find a use justifying that cost to the city for the Fair. The Mayor’s Committee finally had its report and exhibit ready by September [13]. The 350-acre plan was called “a park within a park,” extolling nearby housing, recreation, and ease of circulation throughout the area and into Manhattan on Moses’ parkways. The report was colorful: aerial photos of the site and its use as the World’s Fair; handsome maps and site plans; impressive visualizations by master delineator Hugh Ferriss [14] from building plans “to be developed in a sim-



13. Presentation of New York City's proposal of the Flushing Meadow Park site: site model and plan, with Hugh Ferriss renderings of the new "World Capitol."

14. Ferriss rendering of the Flushing Meadow site (at left in Figure 13), showing the Capitol from the angle at which the World's Fair is seen in Figure 7.



ple yet grand manner," all showed the quality and capability of the Mayor's Committee and its Board of Design.¹⁷

Despite his welcome, given "heartily and unreservedly," and the magnificent concept and presentation, the mayor wanted to avoid accusations of high-pressure selling or wheedling. "Here is our proposition, if the UNO wants to come to New York it will let us know . . ." But, as Moses wrote, "The City's offer [was] far from meeting with universal approval. There were loud objections to locating the world Capitol in a crowded city."¹⁸

The Headquarters Commission met the imposing project with awe—and silence. Members from impoverished, war-torn nations balked, especially at its \$65,000,000 projected cost.

Organization of the Commission was hobbled by lack of staff. Only on 8 July was Glenn E. Bennett appointed Secretary of the Commission and of a new Headquarters Planning Office. On 7 May, Le Corbusier had arrived for his first meeting as a member of the Commission, filled with a sense of personal mission to design a "home for peace." He did not enjoy his reception; he wrote: "In New York L-C was stupified, flabbergasted by the discussions and activities of this Commission."¹⁹

Subcommittees finally appointed were: Requirements, Sites, and General Questions; Contracts and Legal; Film; and Drafting. Le Corbusier and Bassov sat on the first two. Setting requirements for this embryonic organization was not easy, although there was some extrapolation from League of Nations experience. The new Secretary-General picked his fellow Scandinavian, young architect Abel Sorenson, to draft a list of space requirements. Estimates were made of numbers of persons, performing what functions, with how much and what kinds of space, and what provision for expansion. Policy was needed: Would Specialized Agencies and Delegations have space at the site? Would residences, civic services, community activities? Will the U.N. have its own library? Restaurants? Communications? Transport? Parking? Visitors? Tourists?

The Headquarters Commission studied areas in the two counties, eliminating all but four, but

its French member could not resist pressing ahead on his own. In seven weeks, he studied available data and synthesized elements into designed solutions, then prepared his *Report of the French Delegate*, hortatory in tone and dated 19 June 1946. In October, it would be attached as Annex I to the Commission's Report to the General Assembly, which compared ten final site alternatives, with twenty-six Annexes, seventeen photographs, and ten maps, finally dated 2 December.

Le Corbusier's Annex-Report, while of value to the Commission in evaluating sites, took positions and set building forms to which he clung when on the Board of Design and in later controversy. Raising a banner—"Words are bearers of their own destiny"—he wrote that failure to resolve semantics between *CAPITOL—Academism* and *HEADQUARTERS—Life* created indecision between compact sites of 2 acres and rambling sites of 40 square miles; ruling out "magnificent and grandiose" efforts, he set criteria:

For permanent residents:

1. Establish "natural conditions": sun, space, greenery.
2. Do away with daily long-distance transportation between . . . dwelling, places of work, places of recreation.
3. Organize home life to free the housewife of harassing toils: create . . . health service, nurseries, kindergartens, schools.
4. Provide a physical education program and sports facilities. . . .
5. Ensure independence . . . sound insulation and separate views.
6. Make . . . intellectual development available to all.
7. . . . exclude egoism and bring forth values of individuals and community . . . the immense resources of a nearby metropolis.

For the transients:

8. . . . hostelry accommodations. Replace . . . room by apartment. . . .
9. . . . clubs to favour the meeting of temporary visitors.
10. Sport facilities in immediate reach.
11. Instantaneous contact with a . . . metropolis.

12. Worldwide transportation of the most favorable kind.

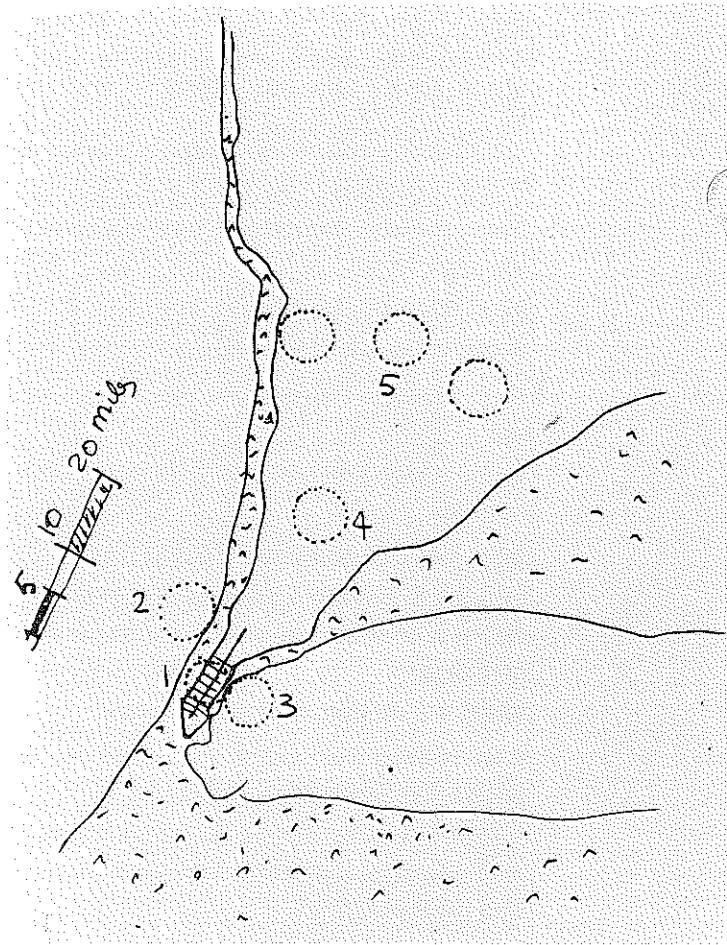
13. Reduce . . . loss of time: conceive a city, concentrated in height, aired in vast spaces, where eyes and lungs will have benefit of the natural beauty and resources, where the mind will grasp time, master it, reduce it, put it to use.

Comparing his points with the pragmatic categories used by the Headquarters Commission and Site Search Committee,²⁰ Delegates realized the contrasts helped define their objectives. Making points 7 and 13 his key criteria, he wrote, "Let us weigh the sites" [15].

He found New York the "most intensive point between the Pacific and Atlantic worlds . . . it might have been possible by a most valorous action, to take and settle in the heart of New York, mobilize Rockefeller Center." But it is "a terrifying city . . . menacing. We are not wrong in keeping it at a distance!" Looking across the Hudson River, he dismissed the Palisades: "not the vast plateau he dreamed but a mere rocky crest, a slope in the wrong direction." Flushing Meadow is "inescapably a suburb, a dependency of New York . . . the United Nations is neither a dependency of New York, nor of the United States. . . . To implant its Headquarters in the very shadow of the skyscrapers of Manhattan is inadmissible . . . too precarious; New York is a thrilling city, but . . . it cannot take the Headquarters . . . into its lap." Next he weighed middle-distance Westchester and Fairfield: "a privileged region . . . polished and policed . . . a place where one can camp, settle down and have room." But he had little use for more distant communities, "out of practical reach, far from everywhere . . . cut off from the main streams, deprived of the voltage always found at the crossroads."

So he came back, ambiguously, to "Manhattan . . . a fabulous fact."

Delegates were finding life in New York's center more to their liking; despite the Commission's assigned suburban focus, they could see why Le Corbusier was drawn to the "crossroads" for the Headquarters. He told them, "I am returning to Paris, but I will let you have a *minority report* beforehand . . ."



15. Le Corbusier drawing in his Annex-Report to the Site Search Committee. Proposed sites:

1. Manhattan. 2. The Palisades. 3. Flushing Meadow. 4. Westchester/Fairfield.
5. Outlying sites.

Before he left, the Rockefellers made a plane available for him and Bassov to study other aspects of the Westchester sites still in contention. My friend Abel Sorenson described the ride:²¹ "On a clear July morning, Le Corbusier, Bassov, Serge Wolff, his interpreter, and I boarded at the Tarrytown airport:

The Pilot: Fasten your seatbelts, the runway is bumpy, please.

Bassov [through interpreter]: How much does this plane cost?

Pilot: Why can't he speak for himself?

Wolff: Mr. Bassov is from Russia.

Pilot: Seat belts fastened? Are you all from Russia?

Le Corbusier: I do not speak English well, but I am not.

Sorenson: This gentleman is from France.

Pilot [to Wolff]: I flew bombers over France. One year after the war is over, they come over here to spy?

Wolff: We are from the United Nations.

Pilot: United Nations? I was hired by Mr. Rockefeller. How do you figger that?

Sorenson: You've seen the maps. Could you circle the areas outlined in red? They are the sites for the U.N.

Pilot: OK, but I need more altitude. What is the U.N.? [Wolff explains to the pilot.]

Le Corbusier: All woods, *comme le Bois de Boulogne!*

Pilot, circling Site 1: That's Mr. Rockefeller's house.

Le Corbusier: *Tres intéressant!* He gives his house to us! What is that town over there?

Pilot: Tarrytown.

Le Corbusier: *Et le lac?*

Wolff: I think it is a reservoir. Right, Pilot?

Bassov: Can we see the other sites?

Pilot: As I figure it, three of them were inside the circle I just made. Shall I circle again higher north?

Le Corbusier: I see nothing; *le bois, le reservoir, et Tarrytown.*

Pilot: It's gotten hazy; there are no red lines down there.

Bassov: I don't understand the site locations.

Pilot, landing: Sorry, gentlemen, I couldn't find the red lines.

Bassov: How much does this plane cost?

Pilot: I don't know, sir.

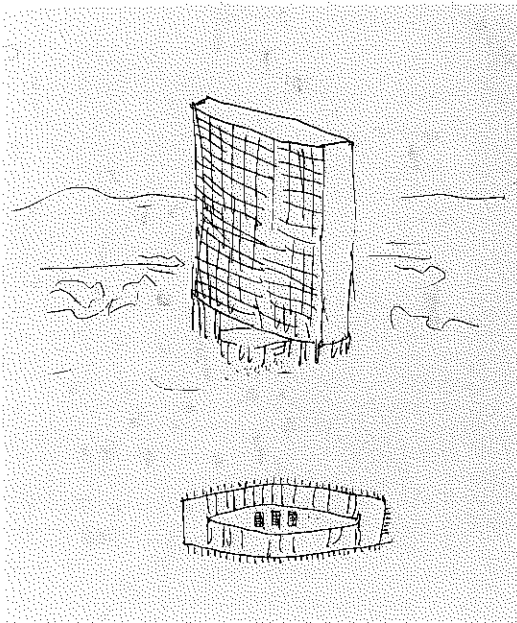
Le Corbusier, feet on the ground: *Absolument crazy!* All woods and small mountains! Very beautiful town, Tarrytown!

Reinforced in his conviction of the importance of open space, Le Corbusier submitted his minority Annex-Report which "landed like a bomb at the General Assembly," Sorenson wrote.²² "Worthy of Montaigne!" declared Dr. Zuleta Angel, presiding over the Commission. At its 12 July meeting, the Commission's report was approved with one dissenting vote cast *in absentia* by Le Corbusier.²³ Bassov, voting affirmatively, sent in a Special Opinion, questioning the 10-mile-square site as creating a "rural, new city" [16a-d].

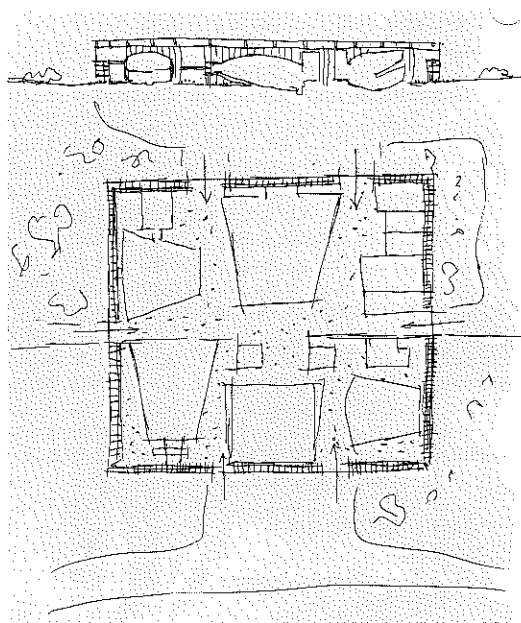
Reception of the report was cool, with vociferous opposition from Westchester and Fairfield. Delegates working in interim quarters in Manhattan were coming to appreciate the resources and rewards of a cosmopolitan environment, without remoteness or commuting. Delegates also were receiving changed instructions from home. On 5 November, Senator Austin announced that, due to difficulty finding a site, the United States felt compelled to abandon its position of neutrality. He proposed sites in the New York and San Francisco Bay areas. The Ukrainians asked reconsideration of Europe. On 14 November, the Commission voted to consider sites in New York, Westchester, Fairfield, Boston, Philadelphia, and near San Francisco Bay. Each had drawbacks.²⁴

Lie's question remained: "Where is the Center of the World?" In early December the searchers wavered between Philadelphia and San Francisco's Presidio, Westchester's White Plains now the third option. When Gavrilovic reminded them of the mandate from London that the U.N. would function most harmoniously in the New York area, Russia reopened discussion of Flushing Meadow Park.

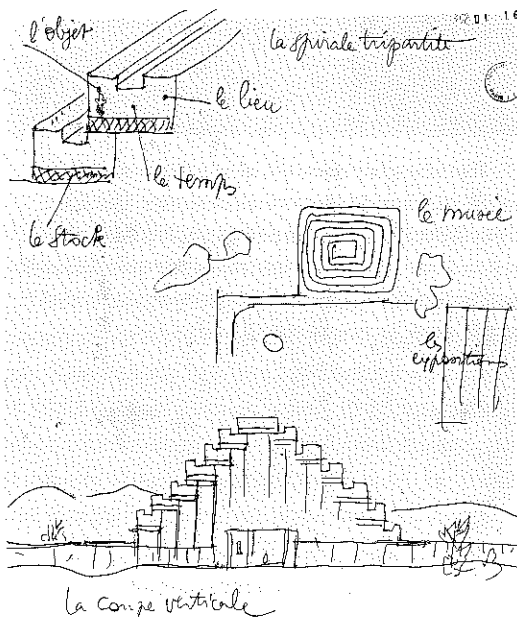
16a-d. Drawings from Le Corbusier's Annex-Report:



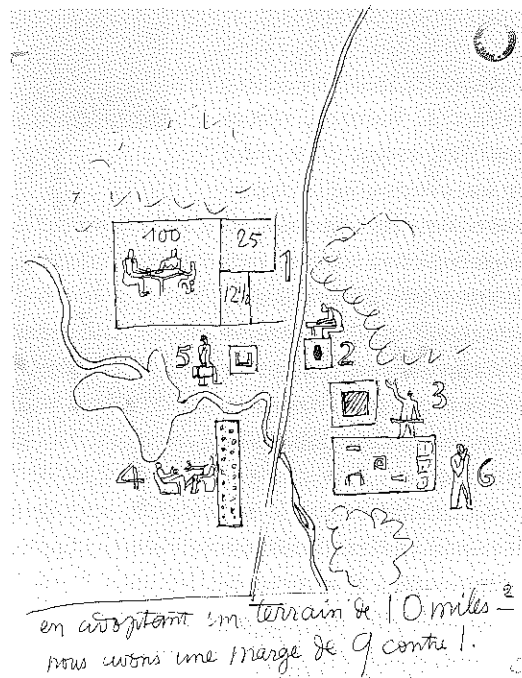
a. Secretariat slab.



b. Meeting-hall block.



c. "La Spirale Tripartite," museum and exhibition.



d. "In adopting a site of 10 square miles, we have a margin of 9 to 1" between the area of community facilities needed to service and support a family and the home of the family itself.

X-City Marks the Spot

Independent activity through this year of search unexpectedly culminated in a selection. In an area of Manhattan where an indentation in the East River's shore creates Turtle Bay,²⁵ a Beekman Place resident mused about the properties to the south: William Zeckendorf thought he spotted a bargain in "the string of slaughterhouses [17]" on the banks of the river.²⁶ During the war, as Executive Vice President of the realty firm of Webb and Knapp, Inc., he had become one of the city's boldest developers. He knew land in mid-Manhattan "ran at \$100 to \$150 per square foot; prices in the immediate odor zone around the slaughterhouses ranged from \$2 to \$5 per foot . . ." Since the Swift and Wilson meat-packers "held an irrevocable and presumably profitable franchise to operate" on the site, Zeckendorf "was skeptical when . . . brokers with Cushman & Wakefield, Inc.²⁷ . . . offered the property at a steep seventeen dollars." He challenged whether delivery could be made at any price. Told that they represented a Swift and that the Swifts and Wilsons agreed to sell the land, but only at the \$17 price, Zeckendorf said, "You've got a deal!"

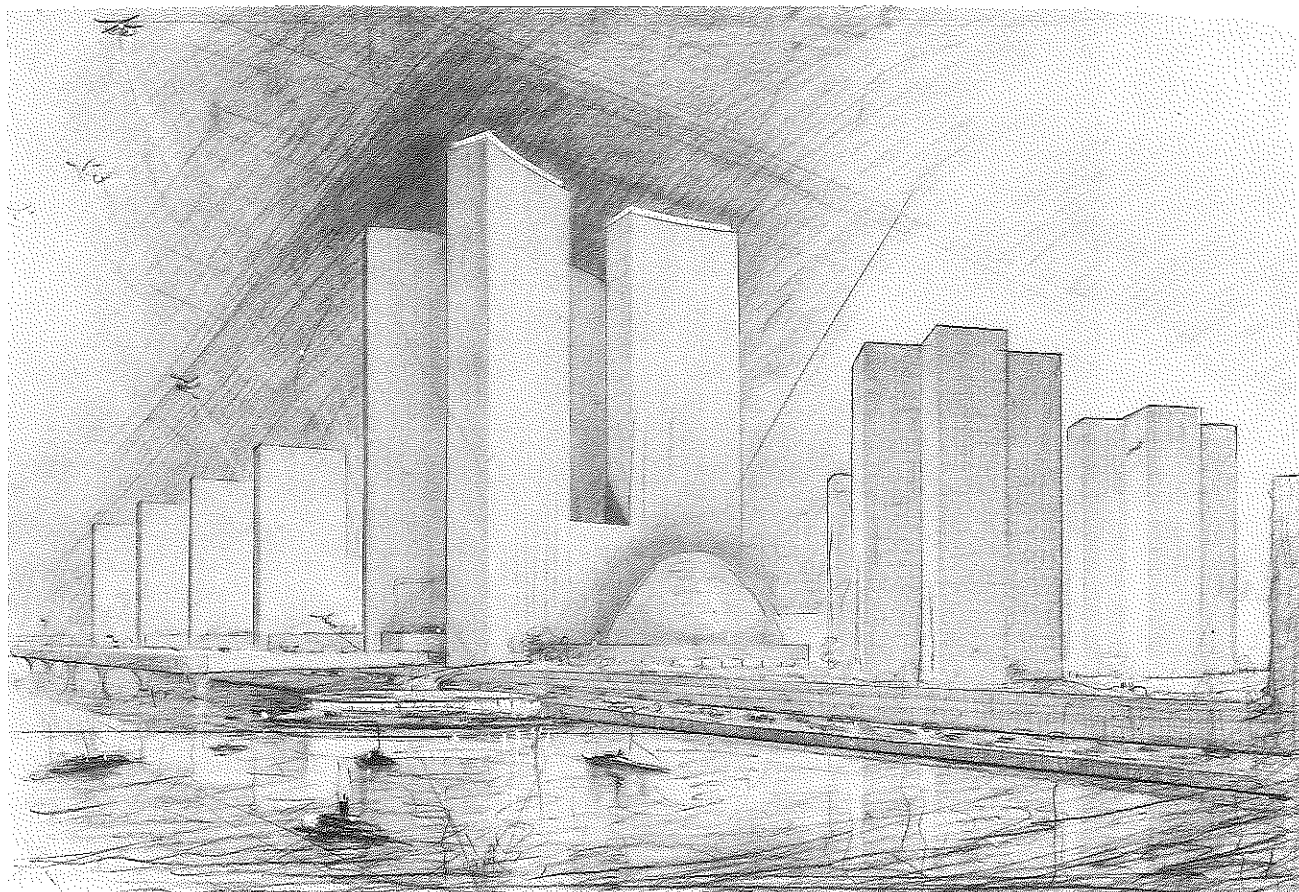
Then, seeking the architect capable of designing a project as effective as Rockefeller Center, Zeckendorf chose Wallace K. Harrison, whom he had known for some time as one of its chief architects, whose firm was continuing in charge of its postwar expansion. Equally important to Zeckendorf was the high regard in which Harrison was held by New York City, Robert Moses, and other civic leaders, many of whom would later be behind the city's proposal to the United Nations. He was already a friend to Harrison, to whom he was making an apartment available in his Marguery Hotel building.

I find no record of Zeckendorf's first approach to Harrison in relation to the East River site, but I recall vividly my own first involvement. One July morning in 1946, arriving for work at the Harrison and Abramovitz eighth floor offices in the International Building of Rockefeller Center, I was called in to Harrison, who said, "Come on, we've got to go see Zeckendorf." Setting off, he pushed me through the lobby's revolving doors and across Fifth Avenue traffic at a pace that promised excitement



17. The slaughterhouses along First Avenue north of 42nd Street connect under the East River Drive to ships moored in the East River; beyond are the Beekman Hill apartments and the Queensborough Bridge passing over Welfare Island; as seen from Tudor City.

18. Harrison scheme for Zeckendorf's X-City, from the East River. Ferriss sketch/study, 12 December 1946.



ahead. Both long-legged New Englanders, we walked fast and didn't say much.

"Zeckendorf wants us to start on ideas for that slaughterhouse land on the East River," he told me. That was the briefing I got before we arrived at 383 Madison Avenue, a fine 1913 apartment-office block between 47th and 48th streets, the Marguery Hotel its Park Avenue side. In Webb and Knapp's offices we were ushered directly up to Mr. Zeckendorf; he was beaming, more wound up than Harrison.

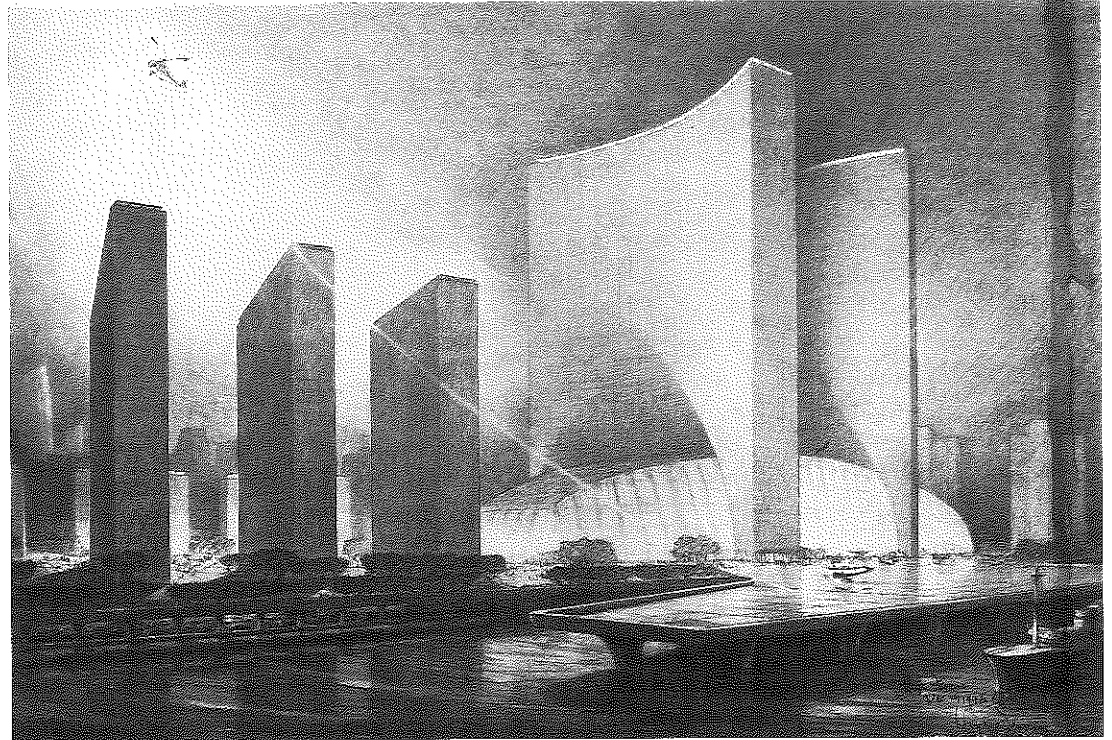
Their talk roamed over vistas opened by control of such an area of "soft" real estate on an ideal river edge of mid-Manhattan. We had to act fast! A month for design and models—get Ferriss and Leydenfrost for renderings.²⁸ "George, set a schedule for a September presentation—people are back in town then." It was an open field—no sign of market analysis

in Zeckendorf's exuberance. The area's size and location made anything worth considering. I took notes; it was all new to me. Where could we work on this secret project? Our offices were too public. What about some space downstairs close to Webb and Knapp?²⁹ What should we call it? "For now, just X-City," said Zeckendorf.

So we set to work, *en charette*, with only the sketchiest program from our client. Harrison brought another young associate, Harmon Goldstone,³⁰ into the secret as the programmer. Later, workspace was so tight in the Marguery bedrooms, Harmon had to sit in the bathroom making calculations with the sink as a desk.

Harrison developed a scheme with a central complex dominated by two skyscraper slabs, curved in plan, rising 45 stories above sets of lower buildings [18]. Zeckendorf planned to attract tenants for a convention hall, commercial

19. "The Blob" pushes its luminous hulk up through the East River site. Ferriss rendering, X-City from southeast.



exhibition areas, restaurants, a hotel, apartments, an airlines terminal, and a yacht dock and helicopter landing pad, built out over the East River. The buildings rose from the "great platform" he first visualized, with five billion square feet of parking in four levels below and First Avenue double-decked.³¹ The southern skyscraper was an office building; its northern twin was a pair of apartment towers, with observation terraces and restaurants. Further north, cruciform-shaped apartment buildings, only 30 stories high, brought the massing down in scale. To the south, 30-story office slabs, sited diagonally, and three 12-story office buildings also brought the scale down to nearby buildings, and those expected to be built in the area after X-City was there.

The scheme gives us insight into Harrison's design approaches. First, "functions in X-City are rigorously separated . . . a dismantling of Rockefeller Center into its component parts." Second, while Manhattan's grid was accepted at

Rockefeller Center, it was rejected for X-City; Harrison and Zeckendorf expected approval to eliminate the cross streets, dead-ended at the East River. Third, Harrison used curvilinear forms as at the World's Fair. When he brought the Opera, the Philharmonic, and two smaller halls for theater and recitals together he enveloped their acoustically formed shapes in a single molded form that the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas dubbed "the blob" [19].³²

"What actually emerged is the fact that Wallace Harrison is a supreme romanticist," wrote Ada Louise Huxtable. "Romanticism, of course, was the architectural love that dared not speak its name for most of this century and the Harrison taste and style is clearly a matter of timing and natural predilection."³³ Oscillating throughout his career between rationalist and romantic, he was happy when he felt he had the right balance. He saw logic in curving tall towers, giving better views from offices and apartments, and at the same time, bringing them

together in a more unified, yet more dynamic, composition.

Also, there was the role of catalyst Harrison played in large, multipurpose projects, from Rockefeller Center to Lincoln Center. "[T]he seed of the Center is a search, begun in 1926, for new accommodations for the Metropolitan Opera."³⁴ Harrison helped bring it in as a centerpiece. Withdrawn in the Depression, here at X-City was a second chance and an eager patron. When Zeckendorf knew the connections Harrison had at the Met, a new opera house became the heart of the project, pushing the skyscrapers apart to serve as a frame, or wings. Harrison also knew of the Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra's similar need for a new home and received enough encouragement for Zeckendorf to include it in the planning.³⁵

To add to his high spirits, Harrison began to hear rumors about X-City as a possible site for the U.N. Headquarters. "Turtle Bay . . . had been mentioned . . . during the past ten days," Lie wrote.³⁶ Zeckendorf himself wrote: "At breakfast on Friday, December 6, I read the report of the debates on the U.N. site in the *New York Times*. At that moment it occurred to me that we at Webb and Knapp had an ideal site . . . right here in Manhattan!"³⁷

Two Key Careers Converge

Who literally first had the idea to put the Headquarters on the East River site is not too important. As happens often, events moved several of those involved to recognize concurrently a combination of factors which could bring a solution. However, of very great significance was the intersection on this project of two important architectural careers, each with its own rich set of motivations, capabilities, and talents directly and uniquely applicable to the process of designing a home and headquarters for the United Nations on the site now unexpectedly proposed.

Wallace Harrison built his career on New York's ridge of Manhattan schist. After childhood in Worcester, Massachusetts, and study in Paris, he developed as a New York architect, responding to the city's needs and possibilities. His friend Nelson Rockefeller often said: "The

ability to identify and respond to emerging forces before they become problems is the essence of leadership." Since Rockefeller Center days, they were co-workers in giving form to a remarkable range of emerging potentials. Now, Harrison channeled such forces into X-City, as he had into the Flushing Meadow proposal, designed to be built on the framework of a World's Fair on which he had had a primary impact.

Le Corbusier's career addressed comparable emerging forces and, since his League of Nations experience, he seemed to have been circling Manhattan like a moth, drawn, yet denying any attraction. In the site search, he was tantalized by New York, by the "voltage at the crossroads . . . a city capable of replacing itself" and becoming a home for the United Nations. But, lacking that metamorphosis, he gave his qualified vote to the "polished and policed" middle-distance suburbs. Le Corbusier, in his Annex-Report, sketched a scheme for the Headquarters, laid out in Westchester, the General Assembly and other meeting chambers in a raised horizontal box, a "vast and regular quadrilateral mass," in his words. At the same time, Harrison was grouping a theater, recital and symphony halls, and an opera house within his Blob.

The Gift—The Decision³⁸

Friday, December 6

After the *New York Times* story on the rejection of the Presidio gave Zeckendorf the idea of putting the U.N. on his platform, he called the mayor, who already had the thought that bringing the U.N. to New York City was "the one great thing that would make New York the center of the world." So Zeckendorf offered to dictate a statement to the mayor's secretary: "We hereby offer to the United Nations . . . seventeen acres on the East River . . . for any price they wish to pay." Controlling the largest parcel of land to be available in the center of the city in decades, Zeckendorf indicated that "any price" could be \$8,500,000 (at \$17 a square foot), a fraction of the cost of midtown real estate.

That evening, the Secretary-General phoned O'Dwyer and Moses, telling them "unless they

came up with a new and better proposition, the whole thing would be over as far as New York was concerned. It would be Philadelphia . . . San Francisco an outside chance . . ." Lie wrote later: "Our phone conversation was the turning point. . . . It started . . . events that ultimately raised the United Nations' tower of glass and marble on Manhattan."

"Get in touch with Nelson Rockefeller tonight," Lie advised the two New York City officials; but it was Harrison who found Nelson, in Mexico City at President Miguel Aleman's inauguration. They agreed Harrison would study the feasibility of putting the Headquarters on Zeckendorf's site; Rockefeller asked him to bring Senator Austin into the picture, and Dr. Zuleta Angel, who was in the hospital.

Saturday, December 7

The fifth anniversary of Pearl Harbor was a day of dismaying memories; but for Lie, Saturday and Sunday were among the most tense and exciting in his tenure as Secretary-General. Zeckendorf took a phone call at his home: "This is Pollock of the United Press. . . . I want to verify something: Is it true you've offered seventeen acres of Manhattan property to the U.N.?" Zeckendorf said it was true and asked what interest was being shown. "Interest! There's a revolution! They're going wild down there in the Assembly. Philadelphia is dead. In my opinion they're going to accept!"

Harrison asked me to get to the Marguery early Saturday. He was already at the drafting table, yellow tracing paper rolled out over the East River site survey. He interrupted to get us some coffee: "They're talking about using the site. We've got to see if it works for the U.N. Nelson's probably coming back—we may have to have something by Monday." For the Assembly? the Headquarters Commission? the Rockefellers? Harrison expected his associates to get information by osmosis.

We had to convince ourselves, then demonstrate the feasibility of the Headquarters operating on seventeen slaughterhouse acres. We realized the Delegates were now used to elaborate presentations, but it was unrealistic, practically dishonest, to go through any kind of design pro-

cess in the few days available before we must show them something. Suddenly we realized we were surrounded by X-City drawings of the East River site and impressive Ferriss renderings of that earlier version of a possible use of that space. Why not adapt that material? It had been publicized; we would make clear we were using it for a 'such as,' not a design proposal. It gave a scale of built space with fairly comparable functions, as Ferriss said, "to indicate the site would take enough sheer cubage, enough mass of whatever shape, adequately to house the U.N." ³⁹ And, we could do it in a hurry.

Ferriss's renderings had hazy luminosity and deep shadows, often night scenes—Koolhaas called him the "Master of Darkness." ⁴⁰ His buildings were undefined masses, moody perceptions. With Ferriss's magic, Delegates could dream of their Headquarters rising on Manhattan's shore, on the detritus of slums and slaughterhouses. If we could use his renderings, we only had to draw up simplified, diagrammatic plans, to show how the elements of the Headquarters could fit on the site. We decided what could be prepared in the time we had. For each Delegate there would be a simple folder which Richard Guthridge from Moses' team could design and get printed in 24 hours, with photos of Ferriss renderings and an aerial photo of the site. I drew a schematic plan with buildings as simple blocks and U.N. functions in place of X-City cultural facilities. For the site-plan title we chose: "suggested method of possible development," using lowercase script to indicate it was hypothetical, to assure Delegates that their program was commensurate with the limited site. On the plan, I started erasing 'Metropolitan Opera' and lettered in 'General Assembly'; erased 'Philharmonic' and lettered in 'Security Council.' The theater and recital hall could be 'Economic and Social Council' and 'Trusteeship Council.' The tall office building became 'Secretariat'; the matching hotel and apartment towers became 'Offices' and 'Apartments' for Delegates; slab buildings set along the East River to the south became 'housing' and 'office space.' Goldstone prepared lists of the floor areas shown compared to the U.N.'s needs [20a–g].

Harrison left for the hospital to see Dr. Zuleta Angel, who was about ready to accept the East River site. At noon, there was a Rockefeller family conference, in their 56th-floor offices, including, as usual, Harrison, public relations advisor "Frank" Jamieson; and John Lockwood, chief counsel. After reviewing progress at the U.N., they placed another call to Mexico.

Sunday, December 8

Leaks of Zeckendorf's offer were front-page news; conjecture, mostly negative, was about the "subaqueous tract" at Flushing Meadow, a cooling toward Westchester, willingness to compromise on Philadelphia. Nelson Rockefeller had caught a flight from Mexico City to La Guardia to join Harrison and Clark Eichelberger, who was on the Mayor's Committee as well as assistant to Austin.⁴¹ The three went to Lake Success, "where, after being held up an hour [while guards checked their identities], they met with Austin and Lie."

Rockefeller put the critical question, "Would the Headquarters Committee consider settling in or around New York?" Austin said the Delegates were still open, but, "while they were not adverse to areas around the City, they would prefer a site in it, such as the X-City plot." The U.N. Committee's next meeting would be Wednesday; their agenda was to reach a final decision.

Monday, December 9

"By Monday morning," wrote Lie, "our private hopes were rising. . . . But there was much to be done. . . . Normally, it would have taken months . . ." Nelson, "thinking and conferring" in his high corner office, reached "one conclusion: X-City was out; it would undoubtedly be too expensive for him to swing alone." For the U.N. to be drawn to the New York area, his difficult conclusion was that the family estate at Pocantico Hills would be the most likely alternative. There was "thinking and conferring" in the mayor's office, Moses' staff room at the Arsenal, in contending cities, and at Lake Success where the Headquarters Committee carried on what Lie called "boring procedural debate" to 11:15 P.M., when Austin blandly proposed the decision be postponed.

I worked all night in secrecy at the Marguery. When Harrison arrived very early, he said my schematic conversion of X-City was still too specific, rolled tracing paper over it, and with his thick black pen showed the use of space within what he now called his Blob, leaving other buildings in block outline. Even that wasn't right—the diagrammatic shapes of the meeting halls were too amorphous. We decided not to include it in the brochure.

Tuesday, December 10

At breakfast, Nelson Rockefeller brought his father up to date: Flushing Meadow had no support; Philadelphia was gaining backing as a compromise; Westchester was losing ground; Lie and Austin were for the East River site, but cost would be prohibitive. Austin reported lessening interest in the suburbs, but, "for want of others, the Pocantico solution was worth a good try." His father authorized him to explore the outright gift of a part of the family Tarrytown estate, as well as possibly buying the East River site, tantamount to a directive to start negotiations. Harrison was assigned to that. Nelson began to assemble the Pocantico package; by mid-afternoon, the five Rockefeller brothers each agreed to give a thousand acres. Nelson called a trusted Ossining realtor to solicit secret options. At 6:30, two thousand more acres were assembled, almost the five square miles the U.N. now considered necessary for a suburban site; the brothers each committed \$200,000 to buy the options if needed.

Still checking a backup, Moses and Lockwood dug into problems on the East River option. "To every snag that arose, Moses had a knife," wrote Lie. "Moses . . . dictated on the spot without reference to a single law book a memorandum lawyers later found to be correct down to the last comma." Phone calls "secured a guarantee of permission from the Legislature to close streets in the site." One snag was a federal tax on financing the gift. When Nelson phoned Austin, he "at first balked, making Moses blurt: 'What do you expect from a Presbyterian apple-grower from Vermont!' . . . they persuaded him to seek support for a waiver."

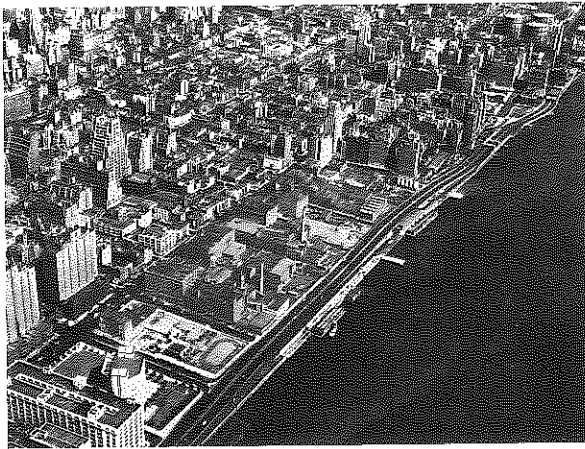
At 7:00, with fifteen hours to go, when Nelson's father was told that Commissioner Moses

20a – g. Brochure presented to the General Assembly:

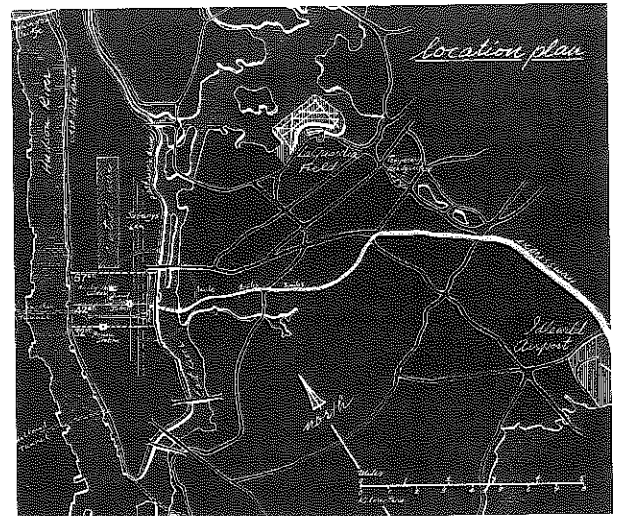
a. Cover.

INFORMATION ON PROPOSED SITE FOR **UNITED NATIONS**
MANHATTAN - NEW YORK

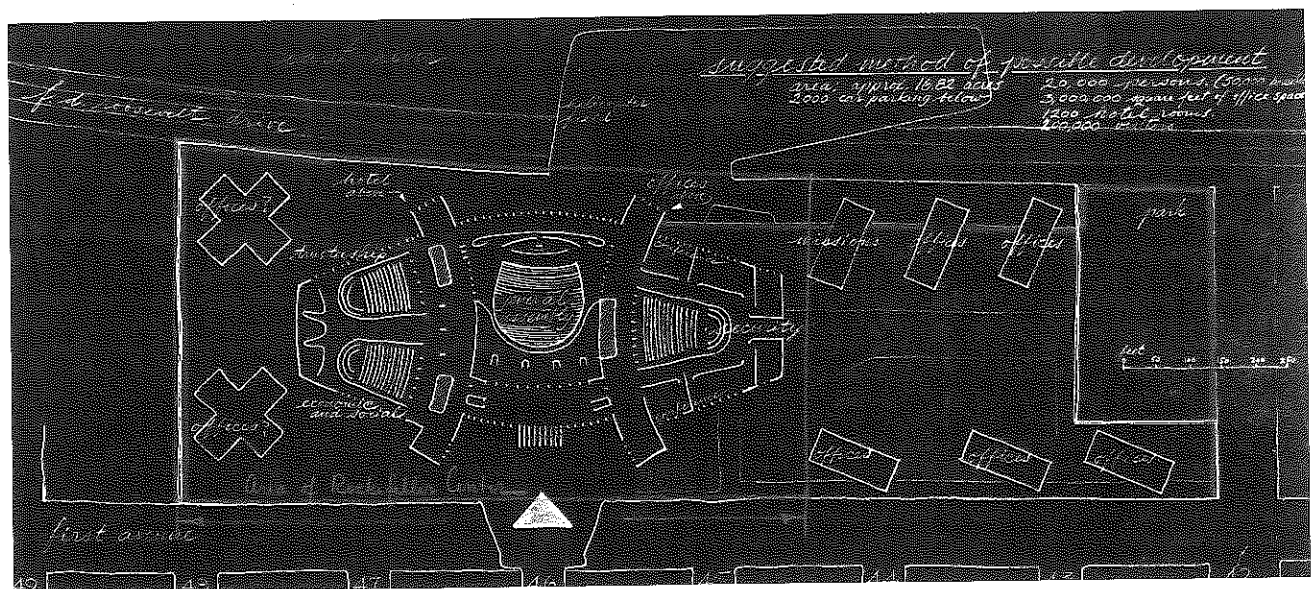
b. Aerial view of site area.

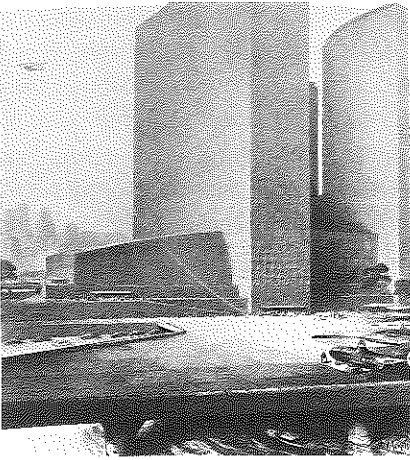


c. "location plan."

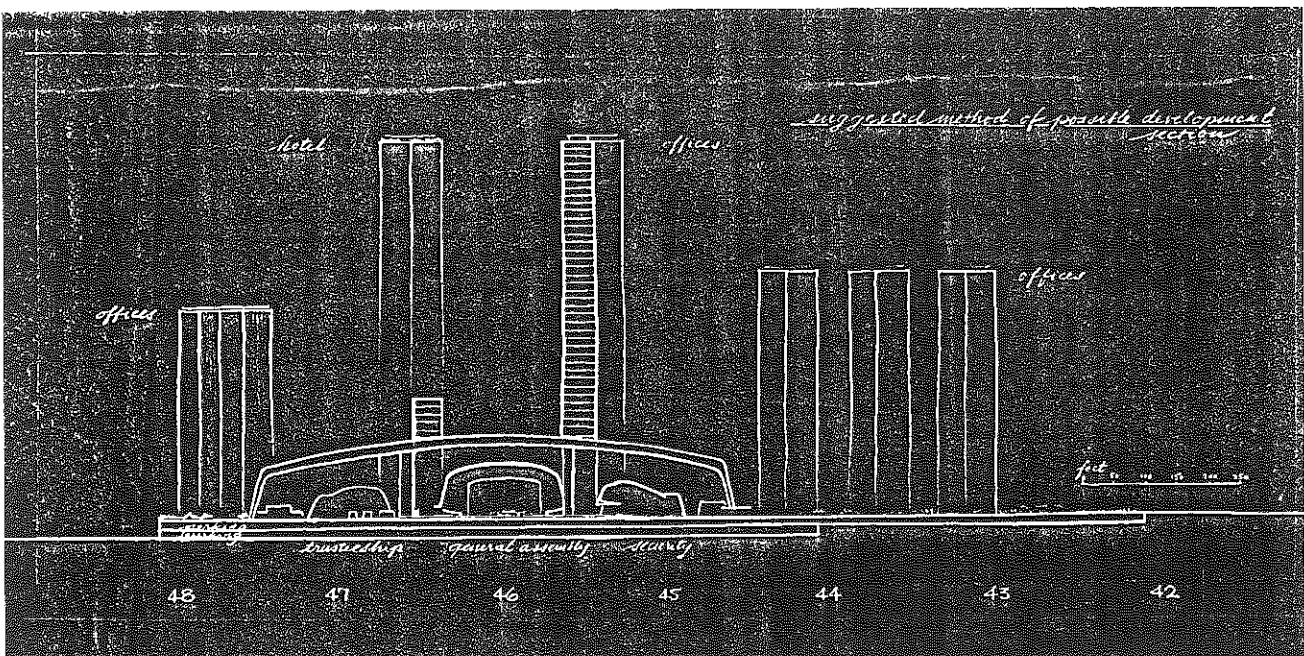


d. X-City site plan blueprint marked to show adequacy of limited site for U.N. uses.

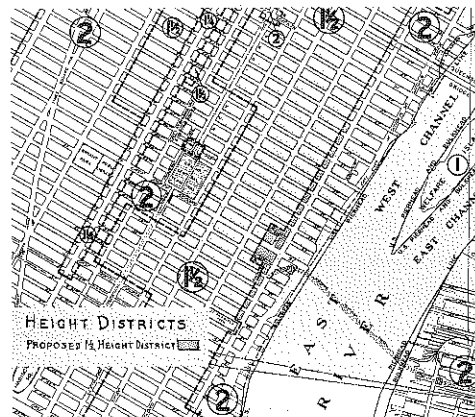




e. Ferriss drawing of "the Blob," now "General Assembly" and "Councils."



f. Blueprint section: "suggested method of possible development."



g. Zoning map of height limitations around site, limiting buildup of higher buildings along its borders.

believed the U.N. would take the offer of three-thousand acres at Pocantico, he urged another call to the U.N. To Nelson's surprise, Austin said that he now thought a site outside New York City no longer interested committee members.

Surrounded by an anxious group, Nelson called his father: "The ideal site, in the opinion of U.N. officials, relayed by Austin, would be the midtown property on the East River . . ." Then, covering the mouthpiece, he told the others, "in a sort of a whispered yodel," that his father wanted to know the cost. "Yes, the property was priced in the newspapers at \$25,000,000, but Wally believes it can be bought for the U.N. for \$8,500,000." There was a pause, then Nelson's face broke into a broad smile. "Why, Pa!" he exclaimed. The tension in the room was electric. Nelson's side of the conversation became choked, monosyllabic, as he made notes of his father's instructions. Some of us recall his exclamation as: "Aw gee, Pa, that's great!" His father had said that if the river plot could be purchased, he was prepared to donate it to the United Nations on one condition: the federal government waive the gift tax.

Much was to be done before the gift could be offered to the General Assembly in the morning, and Austin, on a train to Washington, could not be reached. Lockwood went to another room to draft details needed for governmental approvals; Harrison spread out property maps for blocks from 42nd to 48th streets, on which we had colored the Zeckendorf holdings. As the needed parcels were agreed on, Harrison scribbled directly on the map their areas, his guess at square-foot costs, and the totals.

Harrison wasn't at all sure of himself as envoy to Zeckendorf. "I didn't have an idea how to produce a thing like that. I was the last person . . . I wasn't in the real estate business." He wasn't even sure where to find him. Not wanting to show any premature interest, he had not called earlier, and now they were out for the evening. They might be at Zeckendorf's Monte Carlo night club. Getting a call through, he was invited to join them. Putting on his old winter coat and battered brown fedora, he jammed rolled-up maps in his coat pocket, took the night elevator, and loped across Rockefeller Plaza and up Madison Avenue to the Monte Carlo.

"I tried for an air of nonchalance, but I couldn't make it," Harrison told Herbert Wind about that evening. "Did you ever see that Disney movie . . . where Donald Duck gets stuck high up in the Andes? — the air so thin Donald's heart is plunging a foot and a half out of his body every time it beats; my heart was thumping like that!" He found the Zeckendorfs celebrating their wedding anniversary and partner Henry Sears's birthday. Off in a private room with Zeckendorf, Harrison plunged in: "On the East River site — I want you to give me an option for the U.N." "Is it for the U.N.?" Zeckendorf asked. "Yes, for the U.N.; nothing else," Harrison repeated. "I'm not committing myself any further — about who I'm representing or anything."

"OK," Zeckendorf said, not hesitating, "I'll give you an option on it for eight and a half million." On Plate 33, which he had marked "A", Zeckendorf scrawled looping lines around the three blocks from 42nd to 45th streets and the blocks up to 48th Street, and wrote a large legend across the margin [21]:

\$8,500,000 = East side 1st Ave., 42nd to 43rd — Sq. Block 43-44 + 44-45 1st Ave. to East River + Sq. Block 46-47 NE Cor. 47 and 1st Ave. + 100 X 100 North Side 47th at Consolidated Garage = \$8,500,000 to United Nations Only.

On the side margin, Zeckendorf wrote:

\$8,500,000 to U.N. December 10 for 30 days 11:11 [P.M.]

After Zeckendorf, Sears, and Harrison added their initials, he rolled up the maps and, starting back, found he didn't have cash enough to buy some celebratory champagne. It struck him "funny — a guy has closed a deal for eight and a half million dollars and hasn't enough dough to buy a few bottles of Moxie." Lockwood studied the scrawls at length and finally said he thought they would hold up as a valid option; later he said he still urged Mr. Rockefeller to check whether Zeckendorf did indeed control the property. Moses was called and agreed to see the mayor first thing in the morning to set up New York City action to cede streets and bulkheads.

21. Reproduction of New York City plot map Harrison used in obtaining Zeckendorf's signed agreement to sell the East River site to the United Nations, with John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s, check for \$8,500,000.

After midnight Nelson called his father and went over the draft paragraph by paragraph. At 1:30 A.M., the final call was to Austin, back in New York, ready for bed; he was "awed, speechless, grateful." He asked for the papers by 8:15; the deadline was 10:30, when the Assembly would come to order.

Wednesday, December 11

At breakfast, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., approved and signed the letter and memorandum to the United Nations, adding a note of transmittal to Senator Austin, all dated 10 December 1946.⁴² Harrison met with Moses to get agreement that New York City would do its part and a letter for the mayor's signature giving the United Nations streets, waterfront, and parcels not in the tract.⁴³ Moses was confident the mayor would meet the conditions; a special meeting of the Board of Estimate was called to act on them. Nelson took his father's letter to Austin, as the mayor's letter arrived by messenger. After checking with his staff, Austin reviewed the letters by phone with the Secretary of State. Treasury and Justice were also involved and action by Congress might be necessary; but the Secretary said: "You are safe in saying the federal government will comply with all the conditions of the gift." Austin left by motorcade for Lake Success, with his deputy, John Ross, preparing his speech to the General Assembly. Meanwhile, copies of the letters and memorandum were put in the brochure to be given each Delegate.

After seeing Austin, Nelson delivered the letter of gift to Dr. Zuleta Angel, ready to leave Presbyterian Hospital to preside at the historic meeting, called for 10:30. At the Committee Room, Dr. Zuleta found Delegates from every member state, packed tightly around their tables for their twenty-fifth meeting [22]. Senator Austin spoke with no trace of fatigue; the brief letter from John D. Rockefeller, Jr., electrified the assemblage. It offered the United Nations a gift of \$8,500,000 to purchase the East River property for their Headquarters. "If this property can be useful to you in meeting the great responsibilities entrusted to you by the peoples of the world, it will be a source of infinite satisfaction to me and my family."

"With that the chips were down," Lie reported. Zuleta Angel's voice broke as he lauded "the magnificent and generous offer," citing "the United Nations in this command post of international cooperation." "Thanks to the vision and generosity of one of New York's truly great sons," Senator Austin added. This gift brought the Headquarters to the "... cross-roads of our world ... at the turbulent center of Twentieth Century life, where its work for peace would have a reality and a substance" said Lie. The Delegates, many expecting to vote for Philadelphia, decided the surprise offer must be considered. With the U.S.S.R. joining the U.S., a motion was passed 39 to 7 that a subcommittee be appointed to study the proposal and report back the next day.

Thursday, December 12

Convening at 10:30, the Headquarters Committee received an enthusiastic report from its subcommittee. The United States Delegate had distributed the printed folder with material that we had prepared. Harrison made a stirring and convincing statement, using Ferriss's renderings of X-City. The Delegate from Iraq listed problems he had with the site:

too small, being only seventeen acres. . . . entirely hemmed in within a heavily populated area. . . . all the inconvenient disadvantages of a big city. . . . adjoining industrial plants. . . . smoke, noise, and traffic are overpowering. . . . Headquarters will have no identity of its own . . . absolutely no possibility of expansion or protection . . . width of the block insufficient . . . for the Assembly and Council rooms . . . a tunnel, bridge, ventilation intake for the tunnel, roads, storage houses . . . make the site a tormented area.⁴⁴

With Harrison assuring them that more research was planned, and notwithstanding the concerns, the recommendation to go to the Assembly was approved with the conclusion that the site would be fine for a vertical building. Austin withdrew his move for postponement and submitted resolutions to accept the offer and request the Secretary-General to prepare plans and estimates for construction of the Head-

22. Twenty-fifth meeting of the U.N. Permanent Headquarters Committee, 11 December 1947; Senator Austin announcing the Rockefeller offer. On the walls and tables are graphics used in the site-selection process.



quarters of the United Nations. The first was adopted by a vote of 33 to 7, with 6 abstentions; the second was adopted unanimously.⁴⁵

"Turtle Bay had won!" Lie wrote. "With this lightning shift, the five great powers were brought once more into agreement—itsself a strong justification of the outcome we had just witnessed."

Friday, December 13

In the Marguery I packed up the remnants of the X-City dream, organizing data we had gathered for those who would be the designers of the Headquarters. Our incomplete studies included much that would be useful to those who took up the task.

Saturday, December 14

Just a week filled with the galvanizing action of the Rockefeller family had passed since Lie and Zeckendorf called the mayor. The General Assembly "sat down [at its 65th Plenary Session] to ratify what was a foregone conclusion," in Lie's words. The vote of acceptance was 46 to 7. The resolution read:

I. THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY,

TAKES NOTE, with a feeling of sincere gratitude, of the offer made by Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in a letter dated 10 December, 1946, to give to the United Nations the sum of \$8,500,000 (U.S.) . . . to make possible the acquisition by the United Nations of a tract of land in New York City; NOTES also the assurance given by the City of New York to fulfill the terms and conditions applicable to it on which the aforesaid offer has been made, and the assurances given by the . . . United States with respect to the aforesaid gift;

RESOLVED THEREFORE;

1. That the offer of Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., . . . be accepted . . . ;
2. That the permanent headquarters of the United Nations shall be established in New York City . . . ;
3. That the Secretary-General . . . take all steps necessary to acquire the land . . . to receive the gift of \$8,500,000 and to apply the gift to the acquisition of the land . . .

4. That the Secretary-General be authorized to lease the structures now on the site or to undertake demolition.⁴⁶

The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report . . . before 1 July 1947, with "plans and requirements for official buildings; . . . housing developments for personnel of the Secretariat, specialized agencies . . . national delegations . . . families of such personnel; and . . . costs," with an advisory committee of sixteen Delegates, plus consultants and experts.

Harrison's comment on the abrupt end to the search and selection was, "It's very simple really; the Delegates wanted New York all along." Much later, Harrison told me, "It was Mr. Rockefeller's idea at the critical moment. All the others had their moments when it was a new idea to them."

The Appointment of the Director of Planning

On Sunday, 15 December, the General Assembly concluded its first session by accepting the offer of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and New York City. After 35 plenary sessions and 357 meetings in 54 days, weary Delegates were departing happily for the holidays.

But Trygve Lie felt "pressure to get going." Until binding agreements were made, the site selection could be reopened. Policy issues could still break the fragile resolve of the infant world body. When he returned from Christmas in Oslo, he began on his own urgent agenda; immediate, visible action was the most available means of consolidating progress. Reports were due member nations 1 July and the General Assembly in September. Demolition could begin on the site in the summer; construction could be started as early as spring 1948.

Most urgent was the appointment of a lead architect. Harrison had emerged from final events of the site search as a strong candidate, but only one of a number in consideration. A veteran U.N. official recalled talk that "Harrison went with the deal . . . because of his connection with the Rockefellers. That wasn't so. The Secretary-General solicited suggestions from many."⁴⁷

Lie soon decided Harrison was best suited for the post on the strength of the quality and practicality of his architecture; in addition, his special knowledge of the site, of building problems in New York, and of government officials in the U.S. and abroad made him "uniquely qualified." Lie arranged to have Harrison serve directly under him with two conditions: that, as Director of Planning, he have "the greatest possible freedom from a technical standpoint" and that the organization of the work have the "simplest possible nature" (which sounds like wording from Harrison).

Characteristically, Harrison, too, began careful preparations during the holidays, even before Lie acted. Description of the position, choice of title, composition of the Board of Design were all critical; but rallying public and professional support was basic. From experience, he knew effort must extend beyond the design team and include all the participants: engineering and other technical support, associate architects, the client's and New York City's representatives, and the worldwide constituency of the United Nations. When invited, he spoke to groups and gave interviews, always bringing others involved into the picture. At the same time he worried about his peers, architects and planners in contention: his San Francisco friend Bill Wurster, Howard Mehnick of the Tennessee Valley Authority, and, of course, Le Corbusier, who had been cultivating leaders at the United Nations.

A first question was the title. Abramovitz suggested Director of Planning to emphasize leadership of a team effort. Urging it on Lie, Harrison saw it as a help in gaining the cooperation of the other architects. It also gave broader responsibility and authority than 'Architect' would receive, status at the Director level at the U.N., and near parity with city commissioners. But the title held back full attribution of design leadership, as the Director of Planning was not identified as *the* architect. Harrison made clear the best design came first, regardless of source, but the door was opened for others to receive or assume credit. The title's ambivalence worked well during the half year of conceptual design; in ensuing years, lack of specific attribution of design authorship caused controversy.

Monday, 6 January, the Headquarters Advisory Committee adopted Lie's memorandum "unanimously and enthusiastically."⁴⁸ He called in the press to announce approval of his recommendations that work on the Headquarters be commenced immediately, to be organized by a Director of Planning. When asked, "Did you give the committee a name?" Lie replied, "Yes, Wallace K. Harrison."

Reporters "raced uptown to the office of a tall, impressive, easy-mannered man." Later Harrison said, "I didn't even know I was elected until newspapers started calling. I phoned Trygve Lie, and he told me it was okay."⁴⁹

Before the day ended, Harrison called the office together in the drafting room to tell us of his selection. After much applause, he said, "... it means we've got a lot of work to do — the pressure's on!" Abramovitz spoke for us: what an honor it was for the right man — and for all of us! "We'll do our damndest for you!"

The new Director of Planning immediately began mobilizing the organization he knew he would need: designers, draftsmen, engineers, specialists, staff personnel. From his own office, in addition to those of us already working on the U.N., he assigned Oscar Nitzchke, Michael Harris, Simon Schmiderer, Walter Colvin, Thaddeus Crapster; more came over as needed. Lie agreed with him that other leading architects in New York should be named associate architects, professionals who knew the city and had the confidence of conservative and "modern" architects, and whose firms could also make personnel available. He gave Lie three names: Ralph Walker, a president of the American Institute of Architects, advocate of contemporary design though not persuaded by the modernism of Le Corbusier; Louis Skidmore, founding partner of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, well connected with the city; and Gilmore D. Clarke, landscape architect of many of Moses' projects, Dean of the School of Architecture at Cornell University, and Chairman of the Board of Design of the Flushing Meadow proposal. Clarke, Harrison, and Skidmore's familiarity with that submission insured a fast start.

Harrison also was on solid ground when nominating the consulting engineers: William Mueser for foundations, Emil Praeger for con-

crete structure at lower levels and below grade, James Edwards for high-rise structures, and John F. Hennessy for mechanical and electrical work. All led firms with which his own had worked; regularly involved in New York City projects, they related well to the municipal offices; also, as part of the Flushing Meadow proposal, they could take hold quickly.

The Start-Up: Selection of the Board of Design Consultants

Harrison, talking with George Barrett of the *New York Times*, had called the project a "challenge to all the best architects of the world." The site has architectural possibilities, he said, "comparable to anything on the Seine, anything on the Thames, anything on any great river. The basic problem is not to try to symbolize the United Nations in some highly imaginative design, but to construct a Capitol where the world representatives can work efficiently and in comfort." ⁵⁰

But who were the best architects of the world to respond to such a challenge? Harrison had pondered this anxiously since Lie agreed to some form of design board. He thought of limits on the choice and the politics of U.N. membership that would affect it. In talks with Lie, Harrison told me, they "finally figured that we'd need about ten, to take care of areas we thought ought to be represented—somebody from Western Europe, from Eastern Europe, from Scandinavia, at least one from the Commonwealth, one from South America, one from the Far East, and so on," well-known or young, from any country.

After the New Year, Harrison called me into his office; he wanted to think about architects for the Design Board. I put down names as they came to us—Le Corbusier, of course, then many new to me [23]. During lunch, Harrison added, in his vertical, rounded script: Canada—Cormier; China—Liang; Netherlands—Rosenburg; Yugoslavia—Wisemann [*sic*]; then AALTO; MARCA and Mies; then South Africa"—with no name at that point. Abramovitz added comments on Robertson, Nowicki, and Thomsen. The list grew over the next few days. Harrison took it to Lie, and returned with diamond-shaped markings at Oscar Niemeyer, Julio

Vilamajo, Robertson, and Havlicek. Names were recommended to Harrison by delegates: Nowicki, Basso, and Thomsen. A rectangle marked Le Corbusier's name at the head of the list.

Le Corbusier deserved a special place, but as a team member he might create special problems. In turmoil, Harrison sought counsel around his drafting table desk; Oscar Nitzschke recalls Abramovitz's comment: "No! I went through his *Armée du Salut* Building in Paris. It's already a ruin." Abramovitz was not convinced of Le Corbusier's commitment to excellence in building as well as design. Oscar felt he should be included, he was important, "*même avec ses problèmes*." I agreed. Harrison finally felt Le Corbusier belonged, on his merits, not just because of "the screwing he got from the League of Nations," as he said to Sorenson.⁵¹ While Lie was working with Harrison on selection of the associate architect, engineer, and Board of Design candidates, administrative arrangements were set up pell-mell. A meeting of 8 January shows the scramble, the scale of problems. As "Director, Planning Staff" in Bennett's notes, Harrison was host at the Knickerbocker Club. The ad hoc group agreed on the organization chart Abramovitz and I had drafted with Bennett. The next day a new version was drafted by Harrison and Abramovitz, CLIENT written at the top, to show who was boss. Elements of the first phase of the design process are shown: RESEARCH/Materials & Equipment? Space Requirements Program. Abramovitz wrote "Goldstone" at "Program"; Sorenson would be his U.N. counterpart. They next discussed associate architects: "probably 3 or 4 from the U.S. . . . 2 or 3 from the New York area." The Director of the U.N.'s Bureau of the Budget, Hans Anderson, and his deputy, Lawrence Michelmores, were also present. "Rough estimates" of the program for the initial year were drawn up:

Engineering work on the site	\$125,000
Preparation of Plans	100,000
Preparation of Models	50,000
Preparation of Cost Estimates	15,000
Board of Design	50,000
Unforeseen	60,000
	<hr/> \$400,000

France	Canada - Ernest Cormier Australia - Soilleux Panama - Octavio Mendy (painted)
Brazil Canada Philippines	LE CORBUSIER OSCAR NIEMEYER Crimmer JUAN ARELLANO
NORWAY Sweden	ETVIND MOESTVE RAGNAR HJORT
URUGUAY	JULIO VILLAMIAJO
CHILE China	HERMOGENES DEL CANTO LIANG
PERU Head of Dept Arch - Project section in Ministry of Public Works	ALFREDO DAMBIERT
U.K. Slattery, Hall & Robertson - Bldg at Fair, Chicago articles on - hotels - Arch Review	HOWARD ROBERTSON
GREECE Guatemala - Roca Czech - Trigona	VI. BASILE KOUREMENOS studied in Paris
Czech Island	JOSEPH HAVLICEK Prerubing
Paris prominent in underground was pure for reconstruction of square of 3 crosses	MACEJ NOWICKI in Chicago
ARGENTINE Fern. Kohn	SERGIO REICHERT in Vienna
USSR	NIKOLAI BASSOV
Iceberg	Hall & Co.
DENMARK Royal Academy - not here now	EDWARD THOMSEN Dan Int Moore
BEZOUAT	GUSTAVE BRUNFAUT
AALTO	JEAN HENDRICKX-VANDENBOM
MAR.	ALEXIS DOMONT
South Africa	CHARLES MALCROUSE Chicago

23. List of architects and countries Harrison noted for possible consideration for appointment to the Board of Design.

Not included: Salaries of Secretariat assigned or Rent.

What low figures, in retrospect, but naively low even then. Expenditures were unpredictable and it was not Harrison's wont to unsettle new clients with pessimistic figures; this projection for a year was close to what actual expenses would be in the first six months. "Other Understandings" were: conferences weekly with Feller, daily with Bennett at Harrison's office, more "budgetary implications," requests to member states for Board of Design nominations, a site survey.

The next day, a cable went from the Secretary-General's office to all fifty-four member nations, inviting them to submit "your Government's suggestion for outstanding professional man for possible membership on the Board. . . . Final appointment to be made by Lie before February first . . . to remain in New York February 15 to June 15 . . . paid an honorarium of \$5000, plus travel expenses."

In the end, Harrison made the selection of the Board of Design Consultants, Associate Architects and Engineers, Special Consultants, and Consulting Engineers. Lie's nominations were all Harrison's recommendations. When the press was told of the invitation, "U.N. Scours World for 10 Architects,"⁵² four were cleared and could be named: Le Corbusier, Robertson, Niemeyer, and the Russian Bassov, whose work on the site search helped his appointment. Harrison talked to Ambassador Gromyko and agreed that Bassov, known for engineering accomplishments, could serve on a board of architects, since the two professions operated as one in Russia. Harrison had come to know Bassov as perceptive, constructive, and a hard worker.

When the appointments were confirmed, Le Corbusier was in Paris for his Marseilles housing project and postwar reconstruction of La Rochelle. Informed by his foreign office, he sent a telegram from that office to France's ambassador to the United Nations instructing him to inform Zuleta Angel, Lie, and Harrison:

Le Corbusier approves a committee limited to 5 persons: HARRISON, CORBUSIER, BASOV, ROBERTSON, NIEMEYER who have the same spirit STOP His situation in the

CIAM permits him to propose with confidence Yugoslav Weissmann, Britisher Entwistle, Argentine Amancio Williams, Greek Papadaki, Polander Nowicki, Mexican Lazo to respond to the first stage of the mandate STOP Le Corbusier can later designate Finnish, Norwegian, Swede, Dane, Russian, Italian, Hollander, Belgian, Hungarian, Swiss, Czechoslovakian, Irish, etc. Committee of 5 consultants should be remunerated by architects honoraria.

He then set the record as he saw it, stating he was authorized

to take the initiative . . . to make recipients of the telegram aware that he has the ability to [show] the Secretary-General . . . also M. Harrison, the existence of architects of great talent . . . to take an effective place in the design office. . . . Profound differences separate technicians . . . search for the site has given overwhelming proof: 40 square miles (25,600 acres) against . . . 17 acres chosen on the East River. My standing as a founding member of the CIAM keeps me current with the present chessboard of international values. The memorandum . . . the Secretary-General addressed to the Advisory Committee makes precise how the present conjuncture of events necessitates a unity of views, strength of command and technical unity. In intervening . . . , I have the feeling to have rendered a true service to the cause.

Le Corbusier⁵³

Harrison's reaction to Le Corbusier offering his CIAM team oscillated between "Must we put up with this?" and "Corbu should still be part of it." His volatility matched Le Corbusier's, each sometimes retreating to silence or absence; in my experience with them, both were generally constructive and warmhearted. Both wanted true architecture for the U.N.

While Le Corbusier was making plans to dominate the design team, Harrison and office manager George Johnson [24] sought work space for the Headquarters Planning Office and the Board of Design, away from the Secretariat at Lake Success, "less exposed to possible oblique political



24. Oscar Nitzchke and George Johnson,
Office Manager of Harrison and Abramovitz.

pressures," as Herbert Wind wrote. When they asked Rockefeller Center for special consideration for the U.N., as they did for the site search, the Center generously provided office space on the 27th floor of the RKO Building for the Board of Design, above the Radio City Music Hall on the Avenue of the Americas at 50th Street.

On Thursday, 23 January, Harrison called to order the first meeting of the Associate Architects, consulting engineers, and city engineers, around a hollow square of tables in the new space. Bennett, Abramovitz, Goldstone, and I were with him. The Associate Architects were not appointed formally until 13 February, so Harrison limited this meeting to a review of plans New York City was studying for circulation around the site: access to the East River Drive, widening the 42nd-Street tunnel under Tudor City, and depressing First Avenue for north-south through traffic. It took only forty-four minutes for introductions and the city engineers' presentation and recommendation that the U.N. take the first step, a contract for borings to determine subsurface geological conditions. The day before, moving quickly, the City Planning Commission had held a public hearing on work proposed to clear approaches to the site and "such incidental matters as traffic control, transportation, and utilities connections."⁵⁴

Incidental matters, indeed! Moses was getting the jump on any Board of Design architects, going right on the record with New York City's "givens." Fulfilling the city's commitments made when the General Assembly accepted the site, he held firm against any more ample provisions for the U.N.'s setting or its connections to the city which would be proposed in the months to come.

On Saturday, the city's moves were front-page news in the *Times*:

U.N. Disappointed Over Site Rezoning; Asks Wider Vision. Better Program of Beautifying the Area Urged. City's Approach to Plan Held Too Cautious. Queens' Eyesore Scored/Feller Protests Electric Signs Across the River. Moses Agrees in Principle, Orders Action.

For the U.N., zoning timidity was designating midblock areas from 42nd Street north to 48th

Street: "manufacturing" between First and Second avenues, and "unrestricted" between Second and Third. Hopes for a First Class Residential/Business Zone from the site to Park Avenue fell before Moses' concern for vested rights of existing owners which he believed would prevail in court; despite his agreement in principle, the signs across the river in Queens are still there!

Corbusier Comes to the Crossroads

On Tuesday, 21 January, Le Corbusier had arrived from Paris at 5 A.M. From his Grosvenor Hotel room, he phoned Zuleta Angel, Laugier, and Harrison, who invited him for lunch the next day.

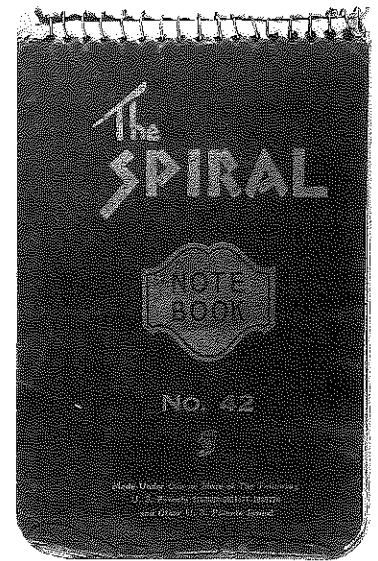
Le Corbusier habitually carried a pocket sketchbook, usually the French artist's *carnet de poche*; but now he had a typically American small spiral notebook [25], which he was to use through the next four and a half months of design meetings.⁵⁵ On one of the last pages, page 84 [26], he drew a diagram of the U.N.'s plan for the organization of the work, possibly as Harrison described it to him, at their lunch. It shows Harrison reporting up to the Secretary-General and the Headquarters Advisory Committee, with Associate Architects and Board of Design Consultants at each side of him. He notes the committee has 16 members and the board 10.

On Friday the 24th, Le Corbusier met with Zuleta Angel, taking with him the "*diagramme Harrison*" and a "*liste des 10*," probably architects he proposed be on a board of design. The ten names were also in notes he made later, on the day of the Board of Design's first meeting, 17 February, inserted in a list of information which he was requesting from Sorenson:

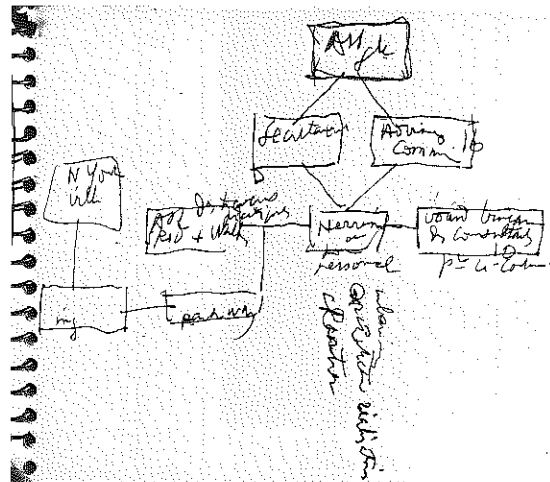
Consultants on Design

C - L.C.	D - Niemeyer
C - Aalto	D - Sert
C - Gropius	D - Bodiansky
C - Mies van der Rohe	D - Saarinen, Jr. [sic]
	D - Stone
	D - Novitsky [sic]

My guess is that the "C" rating was for *Chef* (Chief) and the "D" for *Dessinateurs* (Designers). Aalto, Gropius, and Mies could not be invited since Finland and Germany were not



25. Cover of the spiral notebook Le Corbusier used as his *carnet de poche* from January to June, 1947.



26. Le Corbusier, *carnet de poche*, p. 84.

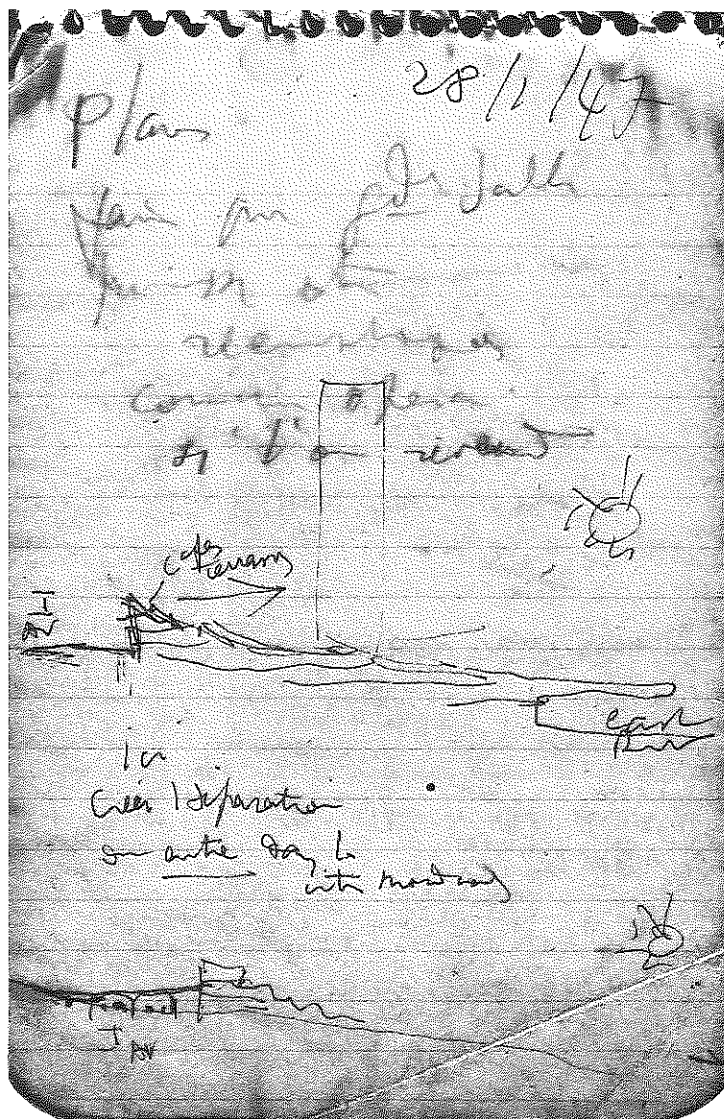
members of the U.N. Of those marked "D", Harrison did not name Saarinen or Stone as only New York firms were selected for U.S. representation; he considered Jose Luis Sert more planner than architect.

Harrison had asked Sorenson to "take care of Corbu," who already knew Abel well as the U.N.'s staff architect who assembled the Program of Requirements for the site search. They met the next Monday, the 27th, at the Headquarters Planning Office, Le Corbusier's first visit to the RKO work space. Abel showed him the New York City maps, and other material still on the walls from the first meeting with the city engineers.

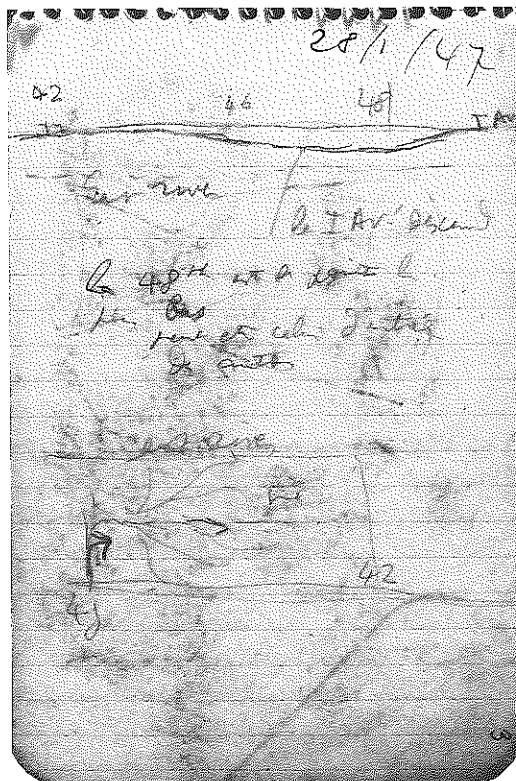
The next day he made his first sketch in his *carnet* (page 1 dated 28/1/47) [27]: a cross section of the site, from "1st Av" to the "east river" with a thin slab skyscraper oriented north-south rising in mid-site and levels of *cafeterrasses* forming a wall shielding the site from First Avenue. A second quick sketch on this page shows a double tunnel under First Avenue, with chamfered upper corners similar to the city engineers' details.

On pages 3, 5, and 6, he sketched his reactions to the site's topography and surrounding traffic circulation [28, 29, 30]. Pages 7 and 9 show dimensions of the site, as related to building elements to be placed on it [31, 32]. On Thursday the 30th, on page 11, he sketched another site plan, with a sun symbol above, shadows cast, and a rough sun diagram [33]. A hotel is at the north with the same curved shape as that he had seen in X-City; the Secretariat is along First Avenue as he had sketched it first on page 9. In these sketches, Le Corbusier in most cases used an attenuated, lozenge-shaped plan for the Secretariat; sometimes a rectangular shape was drawn over it (or vice versa). In every case, the block containing the meeting halls was at the south; in most it spread across the full width of the site, from First Avenue to the East River.

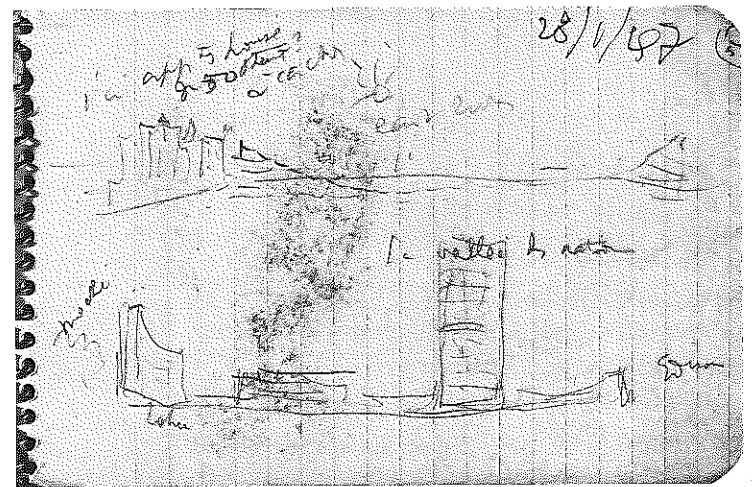
This means that these eleven pages of Le Corbusier's sketches, all made prior to the first meeting of the Board of Design, show the marked degree of study that he had given to the East River site and how he placed his concept on it before the rest of the Board of Design had even begun to assemble.



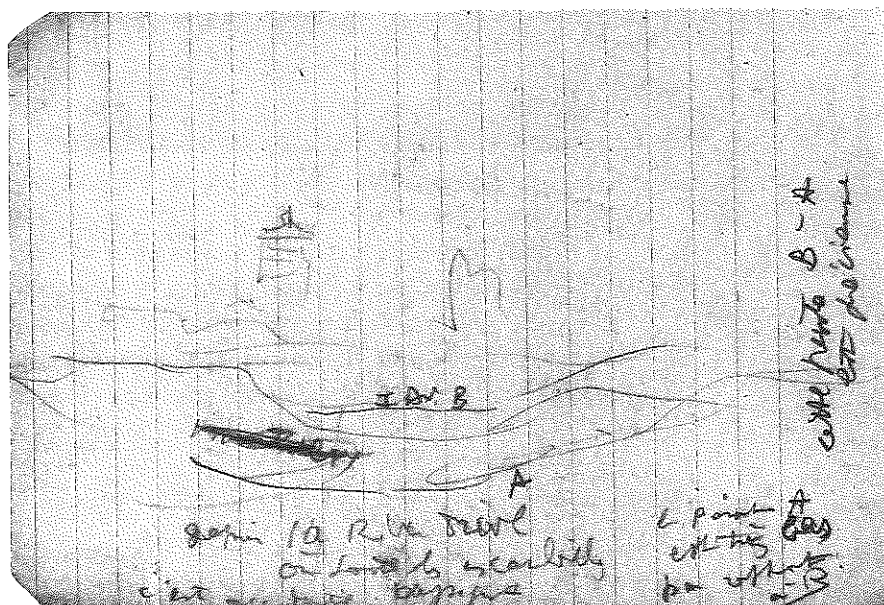
27. Le Corbusier, *carnet de poche*, p. 1.



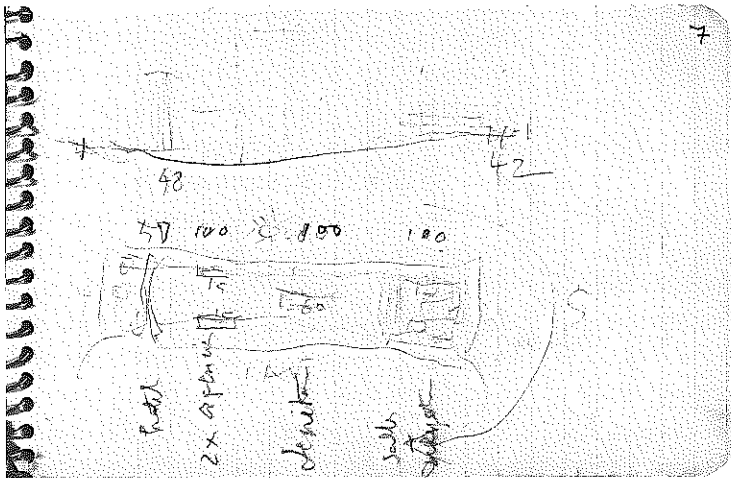
28. Le Corbusier, carnet de poche, p. 3.



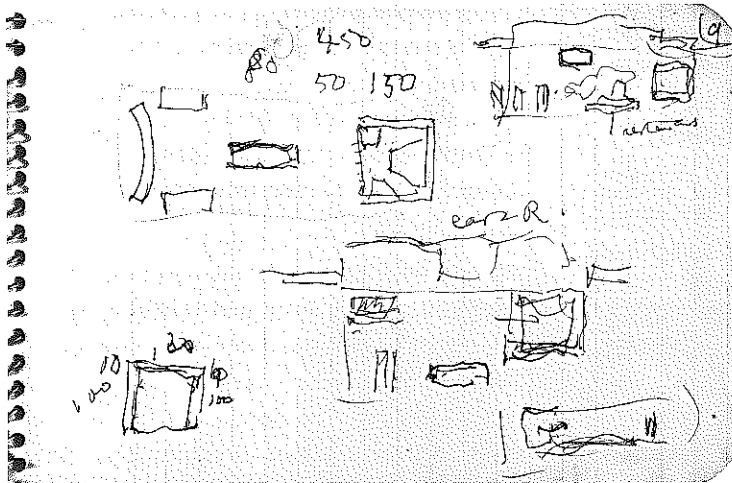
29. Le Corbusier, carnet de poche, p. 5.



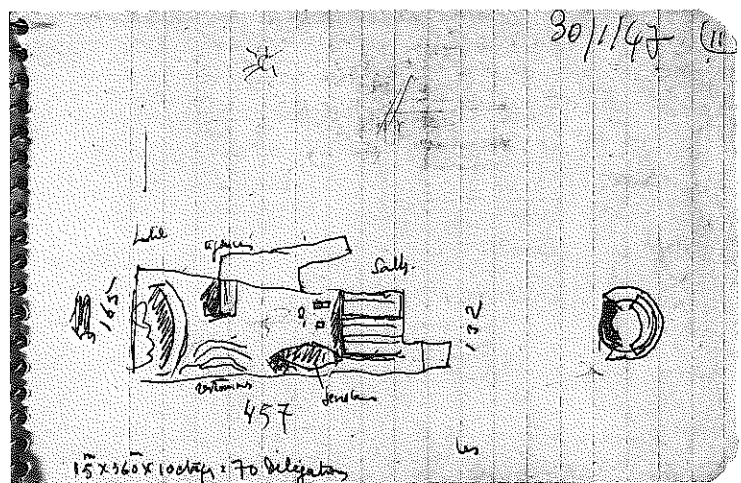
30. Le Corbusier, carnet de poche, p. 6.



31. Le Corbusier, carnet de poche, p. 7.



32. Le Corbusier, carnet de poche, p. 9.



33. Le Corbusier, carnet de poche, p. 11.

Le Corbusier also lunched with Zeckendorf during this interim, Friday, 31 January, and must have seen the X-City drawings, as he made a soft-pencil sketch of its site plan in his *carnet*, page 10 [34], showing the curved skyscrapers standing over the Blob.

The day after the first meeting of the Associate Architects and Engineers [35], the engineers had a conference on foundations and, five days later, in a meeting with the Warren George Company who would drill the borings, reviewed plans needed immediately. It was agreed that borings could be started on New York City properties the next morning, 30 January [36]. They began at 8 A.M.

On Sunday evening, 2 February, Le Corbusier met with Zuleta again, making notes and a diagram in his *carnet*, pages 12–13, about their discussion of the United Nations. This changed his concept of the hierarchy of its major bodies: The Security Council is now on a par with the General Assembly, the Economic and Social and the Trusteeship Councils hang dependently below. The first are “contributive essentials of the U.N., independent one from the other, autonomous.” The Assembly is “annual,” the Security Council is “vigilance—daily and decisive.” “Zuleta thinks the Specialized Agencies do not need to be in New York, but occupy places of the world (the same thesis as mine).”

The visible signs of action on the site and the U.N.’s new planning and construction organization were exhilarating. To coordinate the work of the U.N.’s architects and engineers with New York City’s, a weekly conference was started on Thursday morning, 6 February, in Zeckendorf’s Marguery Hotel. Abramovitz chaired the meeting; Harrison attended briefly. I kept minutes and included this group in my liaison function. Abramovitz submitted a construction schedule for the 40-story Secretariat, to be started first [see Appendix B-1]. Actions New York City might take on the widening of 42nd Street and First Avenue were presented. Mueser’s report on subsurface conditions stated major buildings should not be located from 46th to 49th streets, where bedrock is deeper. Technically, it was possible to build on any part of the site, but it would be difficult and costly in the Turtle Bay area.

Bennett noted decisions the U.N. must make: “Uncertainty of location of specialized agencies and delegations building is somewhat disturbing to the architects and they are beginning to realize that the requirements are going to be very difficult to know anytime within the next year or so. . . . Great difference of opinion on whether the U.N. property would be fenced.”

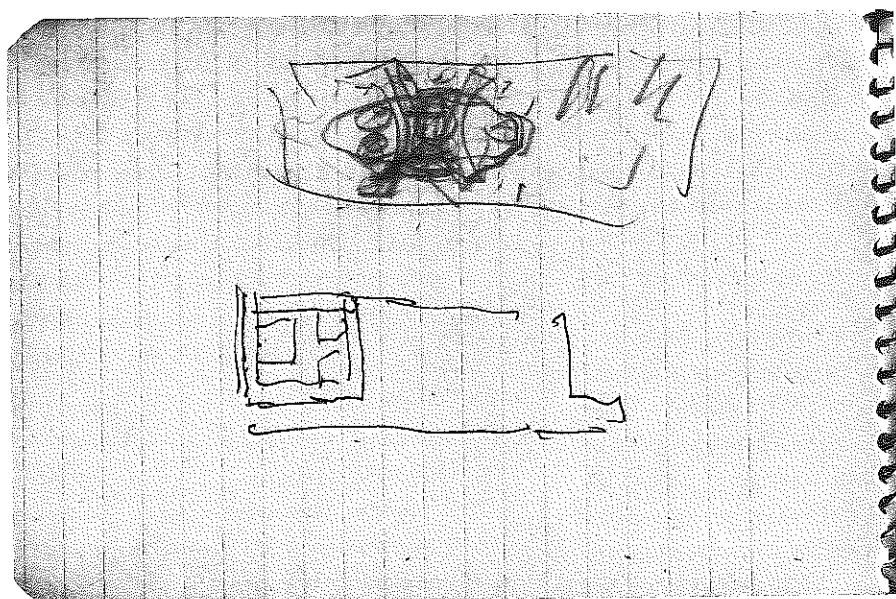
Harrison started holding a regular director’s conference on Thursdays at 2:30, to include Abramovitz, Bennett, myself, and others as needed. The first, on the same day as the engineers’ conference, drafted an agenda for the next Headquarters Advisory Committee meeting. Bennett noted: “meeting would be held on the 17th February [it was held 13 February]. The agenda would be:

- (1) Report on progress of acquisition of site
- (2) Report on establishment of Headquarters Planning Office
- (3) Report on work of the Director of Planning to date: Possible alternate plans: (i) Parking Garage; (ii) Trade establishment; (iii) Specialized Agencies.”

We then went back to the matter of the Board of Design; it still preoccupied Harrison. Bennett had listed responses: thirty-two nominations were received from twenty-six nations.⁵⁶ Although Sweden first nominated Ragnar Hjort, Harrison was “desirous of getting Sven Marcellius [*sic*].” Markelius, a friend from World’s Fair days, was valued and trusted for his realistic judgment, even temperament, and urban design and planning strengths.

A natural choice for China’s nomination, forty-five-year-old Dr. Ssu-ch’eng Liang had studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania; a pioneer scholar of Chinese architectural history, he was already in the U.S., teaching at Yale.

Bennett drafted a press release about the nominees, but before it was approved, the list got to the *New York Times* where it appeared Thursday, 6 February. It was not clear who let the list out, but as printed, it omitted any nominee from France, causing consternation in Le Corbusier’s camp and Harrison’s office; but U.N. officials said this was the correct situation, as no nomination had yet been officially received from France.



34. Le Corbusier, *carnet de poche*,
p. 10.

35. Engineers' meeting at the Marguery Hotel.
Clockwise from center: Abramovitz, Rapuano,
Murdoch, Andrews, Clarke, Hogan, Praeger,
Edwards, Wilson, Dawson, Benesch, Hennessy,
Mueser, Dudley, Bennett.



36. Borings are begun in the northeast corner of the site (at lower left). A Circle Line boat passes giving tourists a view of the slaughterhouses to be demolished, Con Edison's plant just beyond the city's subway ventilating tower, and Tudor City to the west, at the right.



Le Corbusier and Harrison went to Zuleta Angel's apartment in the Waldorf-Astoria the evening of 11 February, presumably to smooth ruffled feathers. Le Corbusier met again with Harrison the next afternoon in his office. For the first meeting of the Board of Design the following Monday, Harrison wanted relations with Le Corbusier to be amiable and productive.

The ten appointed by Lie on Harrison's recommendation would be:

<i>Australia</i>	Soilleux, Gyle
<i>Belgium</i>	Brunfaut, Gustave
<i>Brazil</i>	Niemeyer Soares, Oscar
<i>Canada</i>	Cormier, Ernest
<i>China</i>	Liang, Ssu-ch'eng
<i>France</i>	Le Corbusier, Charles
<i>Sweden</i>	Markelius, Sven
<i>United Kingdom</i>	Robertson, Howard
<i>Uruguay</i>	Vilamajo, Julio
<i>U.S.S.R.</i>	Bassov, Nikolai D.

As late as 12 February, Harrison was still thinking about "the possibility of taking a large number of architects from various organizations, particularly the A.I.A., as consultants for short periods of time." These added appointments would be made "in order to keep the profession entirely informed as to our methods of work." Harrison and I had listed architects in the U.S. who might be considered, including those giants from Europe who had come to the U.S. during the war and therefore had no homeland to nominate them [see Appendix B-2]. Harrison said, "We should even think of [Frank Lloyd] Wright," then decided not to, saying he couldn't work as part of a team and was rigidly stylistic (his own style), as autocratic as Le Corbusier in his urban design. A day or two later, at lunch at the Chalet Suisse, Harrison and I put red marks on the list, narrowing it down to William Wurster, Eric Gugler, John Root, Joseph Hudnut, Marcel Breuer, Saarinen (Eero, the son), Edward Stone, Alvar Aalto, Mies van der Rohe, Louis Kahn, and "even" Wright. After days of checking this roster idea with others, Harrison was persuaded it was unworkable.⁵⁷

On 13 February, the Headquarters Advisory Committee [37], without dissent, confirmed all the Secretary-General's appointments, made on Harrison's recommendation for the first members of the Board of Design: Bassov, Le Cor-

busier, Liang, Niemeyer, and Robertson. The committee also confirmed appointment of the three New York City firms as Associate Architects. Now the work of the Board of Design could begin! Harrison and Lie were determined it should move ahead rapidly.

The RKO Stage is Set

Over the weekend, we were kept busy arranging work and meeting space for the members of the Board of Design and moving more support staff to the 27th floor of the RKO Building. The large room had been used as a general workroom, with a six-by-twelve-foot model table already installed, the site and its surroundings painted on it at a 1:500 scale, showing existing streets and buildings, Tudor City, the East River Drive, and the East River. The room was now cleared to serve as the central meeting room, lighting rearranged, chairs placed in an arc facing the long east pin-up wall. Modelmakers, installed in an adjacent room, began a smaller site model using plasticene to show the rise and fall of its topography.

Harrison took us over to check arrangements and assignments; this was when I was told that I should take and keep notes of the meetings. In Washington, Harrison had seen me take virtually verbatim notes in my own form of "speed writing": truncated words and phrases, abbreviations, initials, mathematical and architectural symbols, or diagrammatic shorthand sketches, all to record quickly and compactly the contents of statements or sketches made by the speakers. Many of the sketches are reproduced in the text or margins of the meetings. My preparation was to get a supply of 6-by-9-inch pads from our new stockroom.

This story of the conceptual design of the United Nations Headquarters is built on those notes and sketches I made as the process evolved in the forty-five meetings of the Board of Design.⁵⁸ Every statement made in the meetings by a participant comes from the notes or their original transcriptions. I have reordered their sequence at times to help the reader follow discussions that were often rather random, as is much of the complex and fascinating process of design itself. I have put each meeting in context: what had happened since the last one,



37. Headquarters Advisory Committee in its first session at the RKO Planning Office. At end: Secretary-General Lie, Chairman Austin, Harrison, and Bennett.

at the U.N. or around town or beyond; what I might know of Harrison's thinking and mood; what the board members were up to; what had gone on in the drafting and model rooms — and I have made observations after meetings, again, to help the reader follow the process.

While my assignment was no surprise, my academic training gave me no instruction about involvement in historic events. I knew I might have to distribute summaries or even transcriptions of some discussions and decided to have my secretary, Kay Mannion, transcribe the notes in full sentences, soon after each meeting. This, I was told much later, made my record more credible when I came to use it. Also fortuitously, I noted the date, usually the hour, and names of each participant, always adding those who came in late, not uncommon with architects. I noted initials of each speaker; in my notes of forty-five meetings I find almost no unattributed statements [see Appendix B-3].

In the meetings, a speaker would point to a drawing on the wall or sketch on the blackboard or large pad, or move models around on the site model. Then I made a quick little outline sketch, in the flow of my notes, with arrows and other symbols of what would have taken a paragraph of notes to describe; architects communicate better by sketching than talking.⁵⁹ These are the only record of that ephemeral material since sketches on the pad were not signed or kept and the blackboard was erased in or after each meeting. In the following text they are placed where they came in the meetings. My notes were not distributed; in certain cases, such as Declarations by Le Corbusier and other formal or crucial statements in a meeting, Harrison would tell me to get my notes approved by the speaker and distributed to the board.

Even more than the site search, the design process which these notes illuminate was a focus for the new United Nations to define and test its reasons for being, its objectives, and its agenda for the future. It was making a second attempt at forging a lasting world peace and its headquarters for that effort would be its crucible.

Meeting 1, Monday, February 17

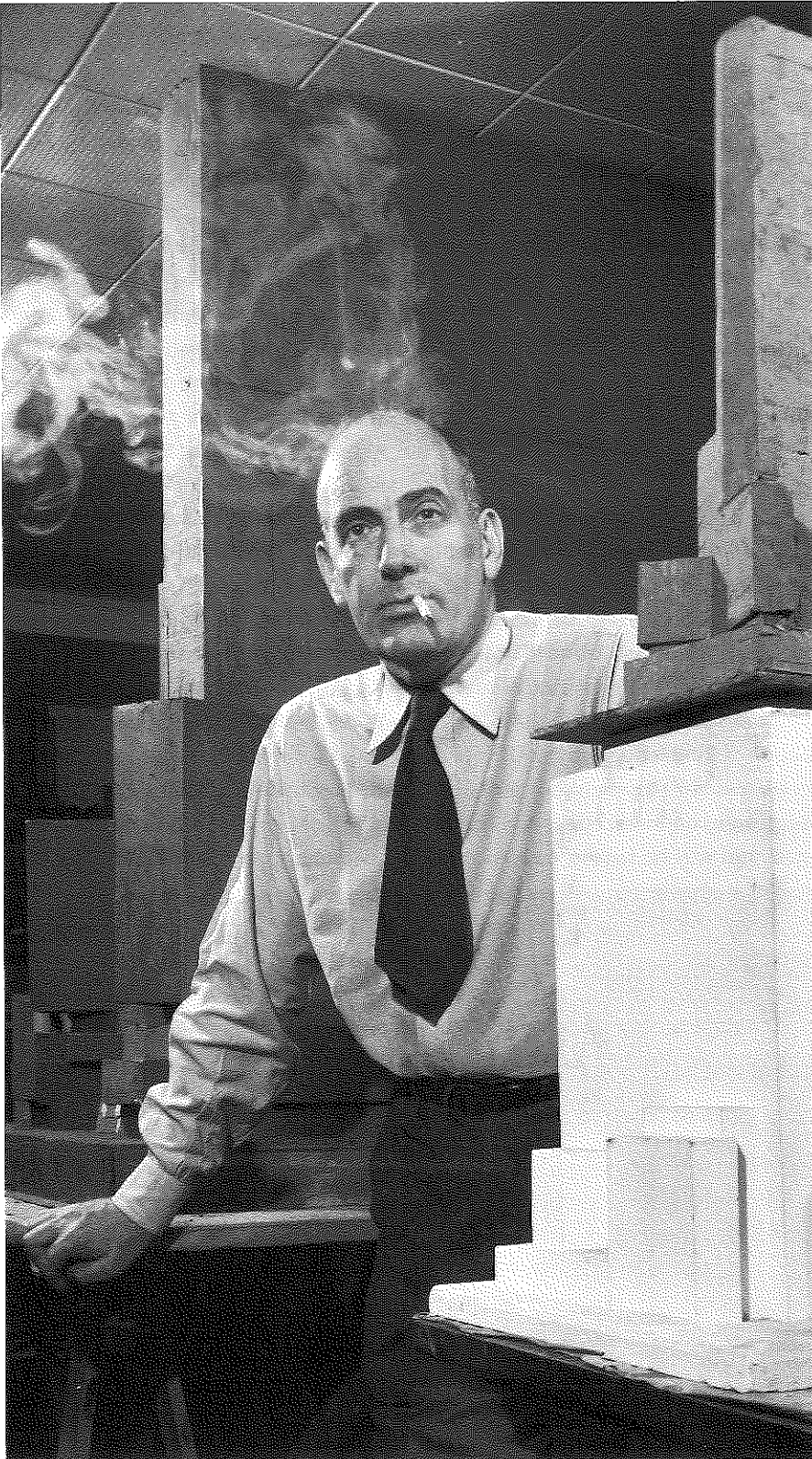
Only three of the five members of the Board of Design appointed to date could be present, on Monday at 2:30 P.M., for its first meeting.

Bassov was already in town, now as a Delegate and board member, no longer searching sites. Le Corbusier had returned from Paris on 20 January. From his room in the Hotel Grosvenor, he continued to campaign for architects of his own persuasion. Dr. Liang Ssu-ch'eng was in New Haven lecturing at Yale University. Howard Robertson was expected to arrive from London over the weekend. In Rio de Janeiro, young Oscar Niemeyer still awaited confirmation of his nomination before he could apply for a visa.¹

Characteristically apprehensive, Harrison expressed uneasiness to a few of us about the composition of the board. Bassov was an unknown element. The first impression was good, but he was an engineer, not an architect, and this was to be a board of design. We knew little about Dr. Liang, an academician and practicing architect, as well as an historian of Chinese landscape architecture. Robertson was a good friend of Harrison's, a strong architect, an individualist at the top of British architecture, but arriving late. Niemeyer gained his early reputation associated with Le Corbusier on the Ministry of Education Building in Rio.

Le Corbusier was the most noted and influential, possibly the most difficult, the most probable stumbling block. Harrison anticipated a challenge to his leadership from Le Corbusier, and worried about a one-on-one struggle. Le Corbusier had expressed vibrantly much of the best thinking in the modern movement. Not only did he break from the rigidity of Beaux Arts theory and practice, he also gave creative, intellectual leadership toward a more honest and logical, yet still aesthetic, architecture. Harrison believed in much of this, but he resisted Le Corbusier's implications that his way was The Way, the only valid practitioners himself, his students, and his devotees.

Harrison's own ego, just oversized enough to fit his rangy frame, was fully under control outside the office. In fact, his most winning qualities were his modesty, the simplicity and directness of his usually brief statements, and his generosity in spreading credit among associates and staff. At the same time, he was the top man, his the creativity that underlay the achievements of his office; he made the final judgments, taking responsibility for them without fail. He had an "eye" and the ability to reach excellence in working through the complexities of the architectural process. Most effective playing roles on stages he created, he adjusted to the mood of each gathering or set one when it had yet to be found.



38. Director of Planning Wallace Harrison opens the first meeting in typically informal stance.

There was a real sense of underplayed drama Monday afternoon as Harrison collected Max Abramovitz, Harmon Goldstone, Michael Harris, and me in his office. "Let's get over there," he said, adding with a semiserious smile: "Corbu will be waiting." He led us to the elevator and on the long walk through the concourse under Rockefeller Plaza and the RCA Building, then up in the RKO Building elevator to the 27th floor. Having outpaced us on the way over, Harrison, as usual, held the door open and pushed each of us through.

Others stood around the long room studying the workmanlike display of material pinned up on the walls.² Bassov was with his translator, Serge Wolff, and Glenn Bennett, both from the U.N. staff. Further down the room were Le Corbusier, studying a diagram through heavy rimmed glasses, Mercedes Laurence, the special translator assigned to him, and, from Harrison's office, the French designer Oscar Nitzchke.³ The Chinese professor, Dr. Liang, stood alone.

Followed by Abramovitz and Bennett, Harrison shepherded us all to the chairs facing the work wall. He had to urge Dr. Liang to take a seat in the front row. Translators sat with their assigned participants, the rest of us filling in or diffidently sitting in an outer ring. Harrison kept standing, cigarette dangling from his lips, often holding the back of his chair, which he continued to manipulate through much of the meeting, sitting only during long statements or translations [38].

"Well, let's start." Harrison raised his voice only slightly; he already had their attention. "First, I should tell you about the organization of the Design Board—I should use its official title: The Board of Design Consultants. Three members, Mr. Bassov, Mr. Le Corbusier, and Dr. Liang, are with us for this first meeting. We expect Howard Robertson tomorrow; we still haven't cleared Oscar Niemeyer's visa. My partner, Max Abramovitz, will be deputy to me as Director of Planning and Chairman of this board. Also from my office, Harmon Goldstone has been working hard with the U.N. people, with Glenn Bennett, programming the requirements they think we will need in the Headquarters. George Dudley will keep notes of the meetings and feed them to Max, Mike Harris, and the rest of the staff, and will be liaison with New York City architects and engineers, and with our own engineers.

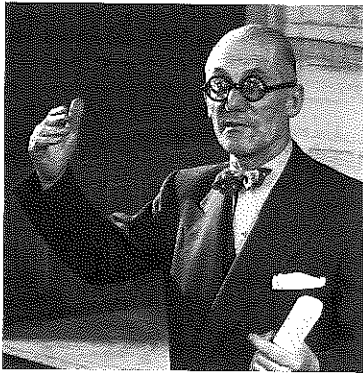
"We'll be working against a tough schedule with a tight program of submissions. Preliminary drawings are due the first of July.

"We have a big job ahead of us, one of the most important for any architect in the history of the world. We should hear from each of you: What are the most important elements? How do we design them? These will be informal, wide-open meetings. Yes, Corbu?"

Le Corbusier [39] had put up his hand at the first break in Harrison's extemporaneous preface. "*Tout Manhattan!*" Le Corbusier began in French, with Miss Laurence translating. "All Manhattan is our concern—the exterior circulation, the interior circulation!

"A. We have to study the organization of the site in relation to—All Manhattan! One—the heavy traffic. Two—rapid transit. Three—the pedestrian traffic.

"B. There are the services—restaurants, etc. For example, a bazaar and a mondaneum,⁴ which can be an exposition of modern sciences and its consequences on the U.N.—and on the world, through the United Nations.



39. Le Corbusier speaks first.

“C. We must consider the change of grade, the site’s topography, its use for gardens, pedestrian circulation, and so on.

“D. The buildings themselves — whether or not the Delegations are on the site, whether they have space for permanent or only for temporary occupancy, a hotel or offices.

“We must make a detailed study of the biology of the buildings, including all the extras: restaurants, staff facilities, etc., etc. — an immense space for the *joie de vivre!*”

Next Harrison recognized Bassov [40], who spoke quietly, in contrast to Le Corbusier’s eagerness to generate momentum and enthusiasm for his ideas. Bassov’s self-assurance shone through Wolff’s British-accented translation. “We are bound by:

“First — the location. It is limited in size. We are forced to go to high buildings (which is good, you don’t get lost in them). We must get maximum use of the site — therefore, we go up.

“Second — the program is incomplete. We don’t know and we can’t expect to know an exact program because the U.N. is changing and expanding. But the site, the whole project must be beautiful, even if we don’t use the whole plot.

“Third — orientation. The scenic effect from the East River comes first. Location of shadows from the buildings must be studied; they should fall on the surrounding area, on other territory, not on the U.N. This puts the higher structure to the north. The east side of the river, if good, could be housing. Areas north and south of the site and on the west must be countered. Thus, the most impressive view is from the river, not from Manhattan.”

Bassov clearly had planning experience beyond his engineering. Here he took up strong positions vis-a-vis “territories” surrounding the site, including both sides of the East River.⁵

With Harrison’s encouragement, Dr. Liang spoke directly to the subject that would continue to preoccupy him. “Orientation is most important to gain

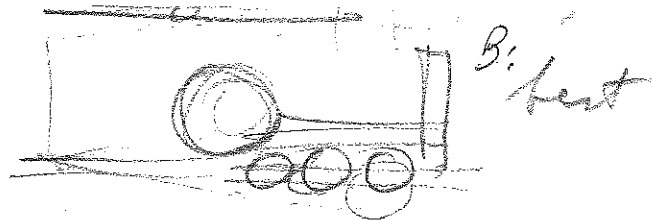


40. Design Board member N. D. Bassov and his Russian engineer associate Peter Noskov analyze their research in engineering and construction technology of New York City skyscrapers.

maximum sunshine in winter, but not in the summer. Western exposure on summer afternoons is bad, but the site in general is well oriented. Principal rooms should face south and east." ⁶

Le Corbusier agreed the "*facade honorifique*" should not be located facing north, constantly in shadow: "Look at St. Mark's in Venice," which faces just south of west. Bassov also said the main facade of the Secretariat facing south is correct and Harrison agreed with Liang that west could be poor orientation for New York's air-conditioned buildings.

Then Bassov gave his own preliminary thoughts on the development of the site: "The first building should be the Secretariat, placed to be in relation to scenic beauty, to its organic functions, and not in the way of further buildings. We must plan the whole site so we can know what part should be kept green for the future." On the blackboard, Bassov, an engineer, drew the first sketch-diagram by a member of the board:



"This may be the best plan: to place the Secretariat at the north end of the site, the three Council Rooms connected to it along the river toward the south, the General Assembly connected to them about the center of the site.

"The Council Chambers are the most organically linked, closely connected to the Secretariat in their operations. The scenic value of the distance is important and if the General Assembly is off to the side, it is the best scheme. The main facade of the Secretariat may be correct."

Le Corbusier, who seemed to resist an engineer making site-design proposals before research and analysis had been carried out systematically, interrupted, showing his concern as an urbanist and his penchant for taking charge of unstructured discussion. "Before we go on, I propose we develop dossiers of basic data on:

1. site conditions
2. program
3. circulation
4. urbanism of Manhattan, the East River, Queens
5. structure — horizontal or vertical
6. architectural elements — with details of each
7. composition."

"Corbu's outline is, in principle, the way we would approach it," Harrison responded. He diplomatically drew attention to even larger parameters set by the city: "First, let me say, on the point of urbanism in Manhattan, we're in a position of having been given a program of development from New York City and Mr. Moses which I think we should accept for study, and then make another of our own to submit to them. But, back to the dossiers which Corbu suggests. The points might be put in this sequence:

1. urbanism of Manhattan around this site
2. site conditions
3. program of requirements
4. circulation
5. elements of architecture, their structure, composition.

Dudley will get these dossiers together."

It seemed natural that Le Corbusier and then Harrison should be the ones to propose categories of information to be gathered, frameworks for the research phase of the architectural design process, now being put in motion. Le Corbusier had long been teaching that what he later called "a period of definition" should start design activity. Harrison believed as strongly that valid design creativity must begin with comprehensive research.

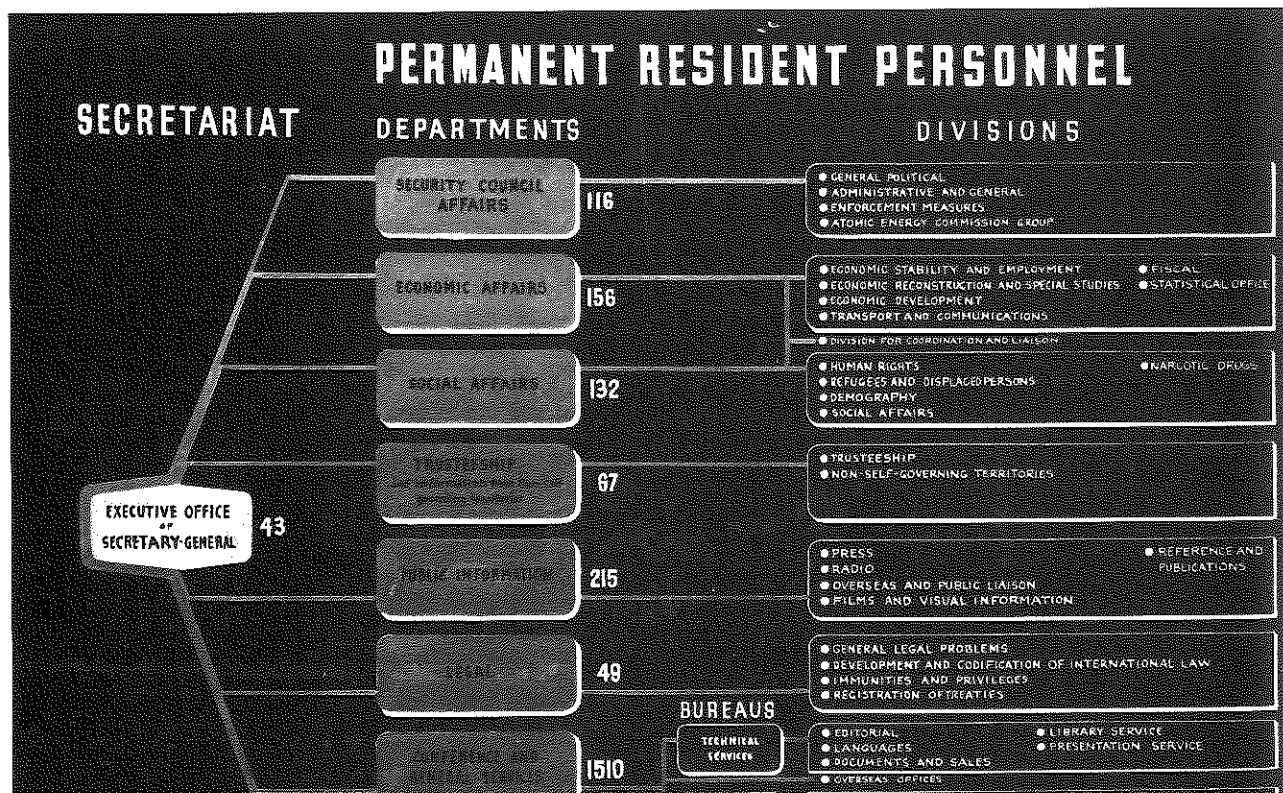
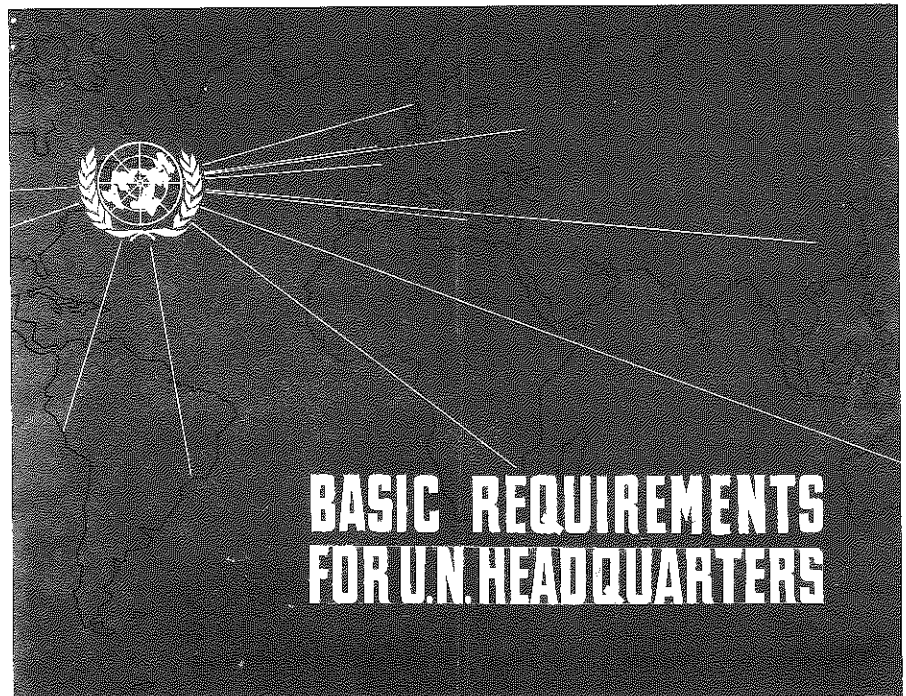
Le Corbusier led off with a thoughtful list, which Harrison consolidated in a more logical sequence: from broad urbanism to the site, to elements of the program, to circulation, and to relation between elements and their architectural aspects, structure and composition. Both of them stated in a few words the heart of complex matters.

Harrison now returned to the points he was making initially about the charge given him and the Board of Design by the Secretary-General: "That brings up the Program of Requirements [41].⁷ On the Secretariat, we've been given present needs, in general terms." He introduced Harmon Goldstone to describe the program he and Glenn Bennett were developing. Pointing out preliminary charts of space and other requirements on the wall, Harrison asked, "How can we write a program for which we now know only a first stage? Even that will be fixed 'biologically' from the immediate needs. So far, we have estimates of the size of the organization five years from now, as a base. Is that too short a time? For example, the future of the library is very important!"

The group focused on the United Nations Library, a building type with which most had previous experience. Le Corbusier's approach was to analyze its organization in order to estimate what its growth would be. Bassov empirically judged that a projection of the first five years of its organization and growth would be sound, to estimate expansion needs, horizontally and vertically, knowing vertical expansion in a skyscraper would be difficult.⁸ The tentative conclusion was: five years would be adequate for the first phase, with plans for horizontal expansion later.

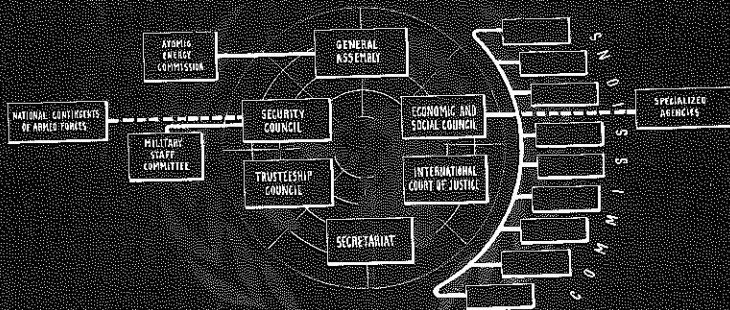
Should the library be in the Secretariat? Was it necessary at all, especially when the library of the former League of Nations was still operating in Geneva and, as Harrison reported, New York City had spoken of putting a branch of its public library in the area to serve the U.N.? When would these decisions be made? Harrison guessed it would probably take a year, prompting Bassov to suggest designing the library as an organic part of the complex, but "so it can be taken out without loss." Dr. Liang recommended it be kept a separate building, estimating it "will expand more rapidly than the rest—as much as 35,000 volumes per year." Le Corbusier said the library would be as important to those working in meeting-hall areas as it would be to the Delegates' offices and the Secretariat; he also pointed out that there would be research activity in such a library. Harrison agreed it would be a working library, close to the Secretariat. Bassov repeated, "... attached to the Secretariat, close but easily enlarged."

41. The Program of Requirements was assembled and presented diagrammatically, including staffing and space requirements for the meeting halls, the Secretariat, other service areas, and Specialized Agencies for which provision might have to be made.



PERSONNEL 1 JANUARY 1947 TOTAL 2551

PRINCIPAL ORGANS



 = 500 EMPLOYEES

 500 ESTIMATED INCREASE BY DEC. 1947
TOTAL 3050

SECRETARIAT

 25 MISSIONS OF 5 PERSONS = 125
25 " " 20 " = 500
15 " " 30 " = 450
5 " " 175 " = 875
70 MISSIONS = 1950

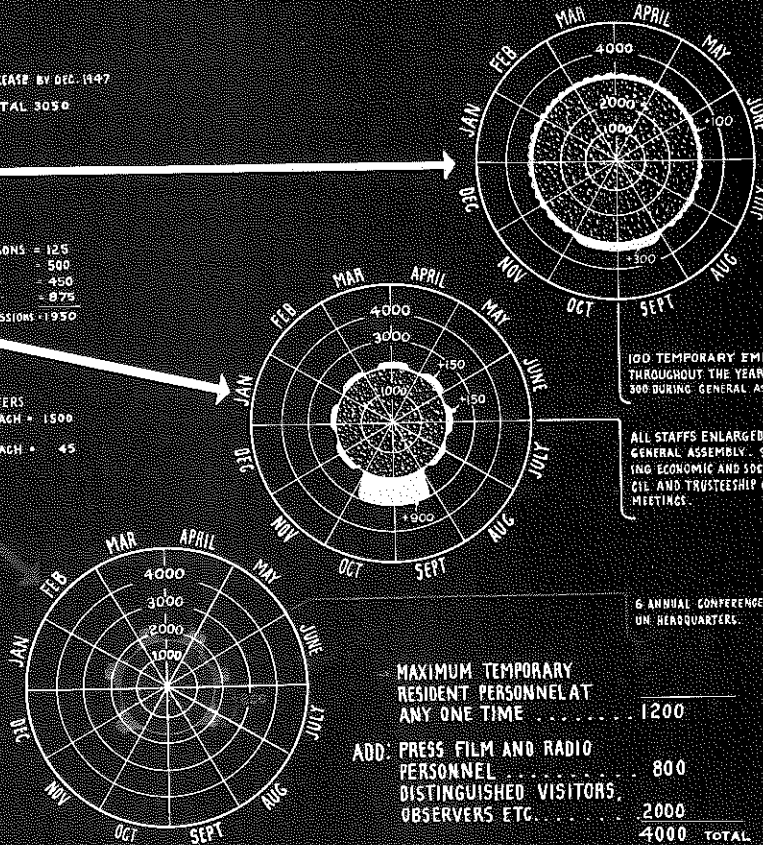
DELEGATIONS

6 PERMANENT HEADQUARTERS
250 PERSONS EACH = 1500
9 LIAISON OFFICES
5 PERSONS EACH = 45

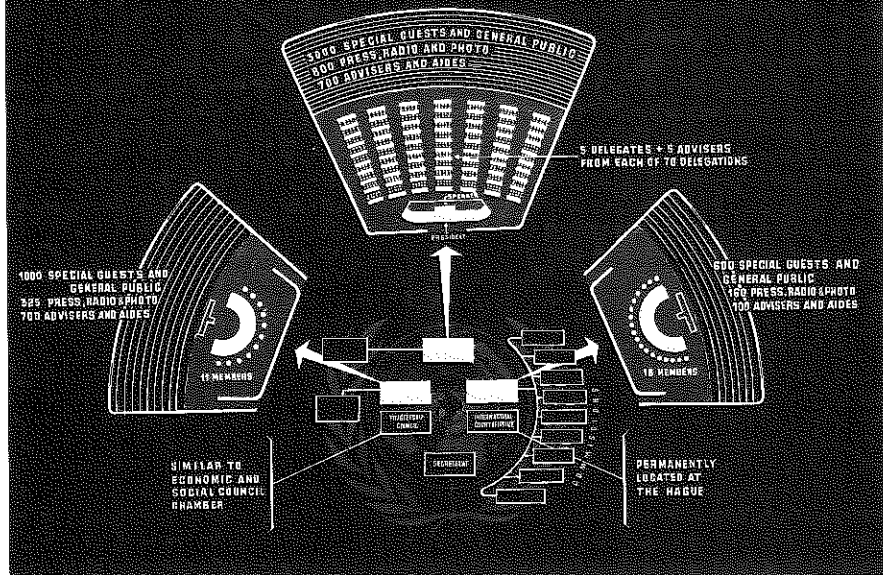
SPECIALIZED AGENCIES

6550 TOTAL

MONTHLY FLUCTUATION

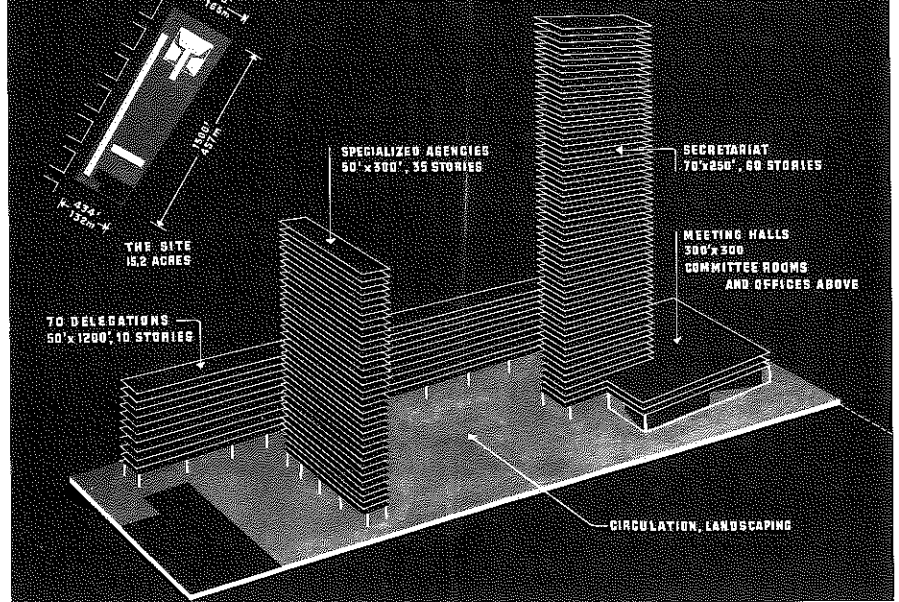


OFFICIAL BUILDING REQUIREMENTS MEETING HALLS



SYNTHESIS OF OFFICIAL BUILDING ELEMENTS

PROPORTIONATE HEIGHTS FOR A GROUND COVERAGE OF 25%

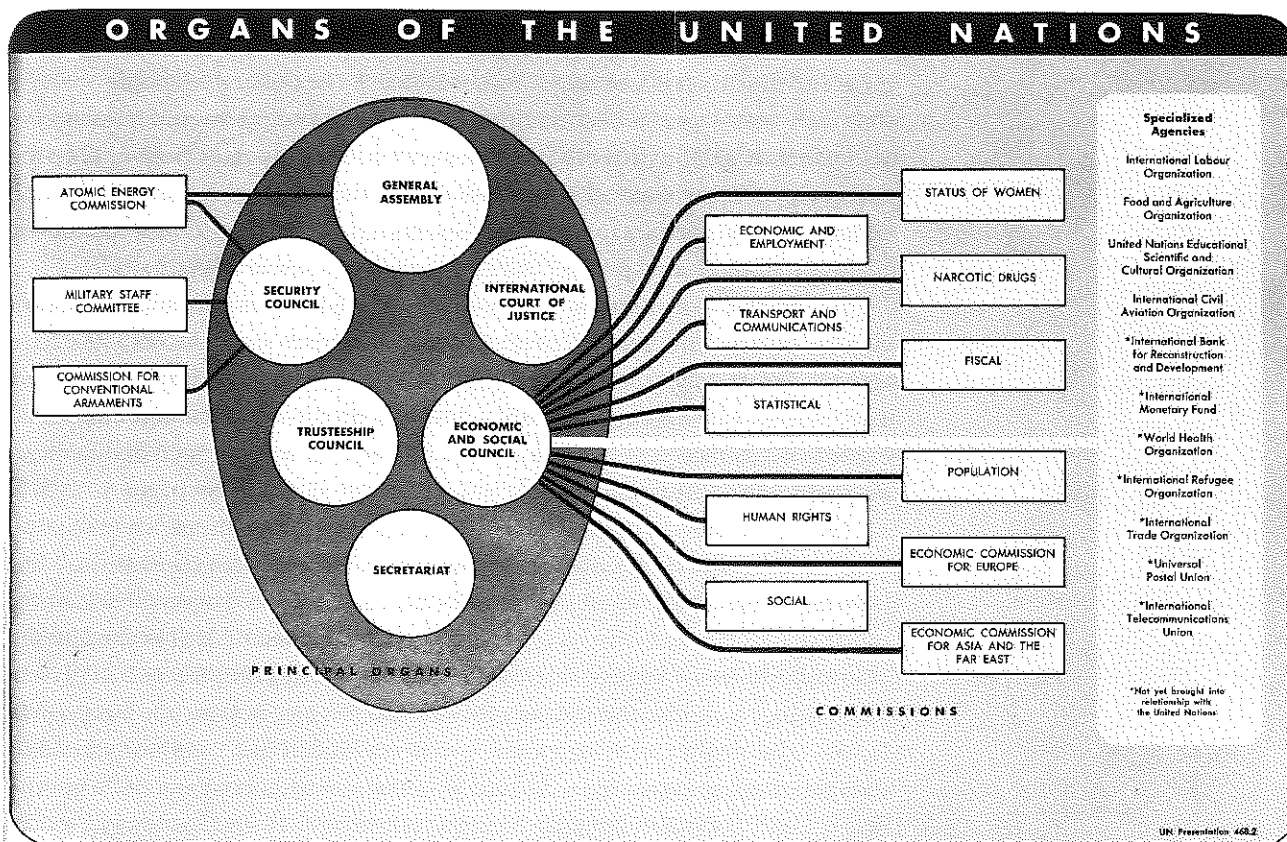


I observed an early phase of program research developing as each architect raised questions based on his previous experience, which stimulated investigation from fresh points of view and helped insure that analysis was comprehensive and realistically related to the nature and future of this project.

In this case, Goldstone, Sorenson, and others working on the program would now respond to points made in discussion of their first drafts. They looked to many sources of information and experience; discussions would be held with experts in this field, within the U.N. and from outside.⁹

Other preliminary questions were raised: Will living space for the Delegations be on-site or elsewhere? Seventeen nations were already showing interest in such space. What restaurants will be needed? What office space will be provided for Specialized Agencies? Goldstone had listed fourteen agencies already in existence, some surviving from their creation under the League of Nations [42].¹⁰

Abruptly, Le Corbusier asked, "Who will take the decision?" Harrison countered, "Who pays for a building for those agencies?"



42. This chart from the 1946/47 U.N. Yearbook shows eleven Specialized Agencies already being brought into relationships with the United Nations.

Le Corbusier was against Specialized Agencies coming to New York, as he wrote in his Annex to the Site Search Commission's Report when he took a stand against centralizing them on the site or even in New York City. He anticipated their substantial growth and would locate them in other regions of the world to broaden support for the U.N.

Harrison said providing housing for the Delegations raised political questions: Do we provide for the United States? For small countries? To Bassov it was an economic issue: Which countries would come in and which would rent or buy private space elsewhere? He felt U.N. letting of commercial space wouldn't work. "We can't know definitely what the needs will be. We can't treat Delegates like children," assigning space in advance; "we must give them choice." To Le Corbusier it was "a spiritual question of U.N. policy." Now he said, "The question is psychological — each nation must have a proprietary interest in its space."

Nevertheless, for the time being, Harrison kept buildings for the Delegations and Specialized Agencies in the program. "The problem is: one skyscraper or three? One type of skyscraper for the Secretariat, one for Delegations, one for Specialized Agencies? The other question is the relationship between the Secretariat and the General Assembly, and their interrelations with the Security and other Councils, and so on."

Le Corbusier emphasized that "Only certain people connect the Secretariat and the General Assembly." Bassov added, "The General Assembly operates only six weeks a year, while the three Councils operate year-round, close to the Secretariat. It will be better to keep the General Assembly apart from it; keep the car traffic separate also." These two had sparred during the site search, each adding personal annexes to that commission's report. Harrison appeared relieved to find Le Corbusier respecting Bassov's knowledge and firmness.

In this first meeting, Le Corbusier seemed impatient with the board's committee structure. After an hour, he wanted to reach a conclusion. "We have agreed: the office building to the north; the spectacle will be from the river; we must obscure surrounding bad stuff"; although, prior to this meeting,¹¹ his thinking had had the Secretariat in the center of the site, as we have seen in his *carnet de poche*. From 28 January to 14 February, in nine sketches, on pages 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 14, he showed the Secretariat in the center or the southern part of the site.

Others present didn't seem ready for such conclusiveness at their first meeting. Abramovitz was able to distill only "some general agreement" on the tentative program and even on a 50 percent expansion factor. He checked the list of meeting halls — "the General Assembly with space approximately as at present in Flushing, . . . the three Councils, the Conference Rooms, the Committee Rooms, plus smaller meeting rooms" — and concluded that "all these should be thought of as a group of halls." It was this mention by Abramovitz of "a group" that led into discussion of Le Corbusier's preconceived form: an elevated square block enclosing all these halls. Arrangement of these halls was to be the most difficult problem with which the board struggled in days to come.

Even as Abramovitz gave him this opening, Le Corbusier brought up an idea that breached his monolithic-block concept. "Zuleta Angel told me that the Security Council should be, architecturally, a 'sentinel' of the group."¹²

Harrison cut in, asking Abramovitz to explain the drawings of the sections cut longitudinally and latitudinally across the site. The group also studied

molded plasticene site models showing grades and slopes of the topography from First Avenue down to the East River, and surrounding blocks of existing buildings.

Le Corbusier immediately said, "Low buildings should be put on the higher part, high buildings on the lower part." On the fifth page of his *carnet de poche*, he had conceived of the site as a "Valley of Nations," swinging down from 48th Street to the low Turtle Bay area and back up to 42nd Street, between the existing apartments at 50th Street to the north and the Consolidated Edison plant at the south. He indicated the site should rise to obscure these surrounding structures, and introduced built-up landscaped "hills"¹³ to screen those across First Avenue.

Oscar Nitzchke said, "The whole site should be utilized." Those familiar with Manhattan anticipated the site would probably be brought to the level of connecting streets, with access to it kept at grade. Harrison finally drew a conclusion from this initial meeting: "It seems agreed we should fill the whole site." He added a thought of his own: "Make good provision for pedestrian traffic underground," harking back to the effective concourse connecting units of Rockefeller Center. "But what's right for parking? We can get two thousand cars on one level and more if we go up or down, but multilevel parking isn't really good." Max had already estimated that covering the whole site with a single level of construction would cost \$15,000,000.

With these down-to-earth observations, Harrison ended the meeting, saying work on the program would be pushed, setting 2:30 each afternoon as the time for future meetings—"but not tomorrow. We will be meeting with Commissioner Moses on the city's plans. Howard Robertson will be with us by Wednesday."

Even in this first meeting very significant "design threads"¹⁴ are placed in the fabric that will gradually emerge:

First, the high-rise form of the Secretariat, based on its efficiency for office space and the tight site. The first schemes drawn up in the drafting room under Abramovitz and Harris used the vertical slab. Le Corbusier sketched it in his Annex to the Site Selection Report and now was using it in his *carnet de poche*. Harrison had used vertical curved slabs for the office building and hotel in his design of X-City.

Second, as Bassov said at the start of the meeting, the "maximum use of the site . . . the whole project must be beautiful, even if we don't use the whole plot [for buildings]," a useful distinction.

Third, the north-south orientation of the Secretariat slab, window walls facing east and west, aligned with the north-south directionality of the site, parallel to its East River border.

Not everyone agreed with these "threads," but support grew until they were part of the conceptual scheme ultimately adopted by the Board of Design.¹⁵